

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**Discipleship among Asylum Seekers at Christ Church Bangkok: An
Interpretative Phenomenological Inquiry into Spiritual Growth**

By

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ABSTRACT

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As a first-year undergraduate college student, I remember when an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship student leader asked if I would meet with her regularly to read and discuss the book *Knowing God*. I felt so honored to have these regular meals and conversations with a college senior who was genuinely interested in my personal and spiritual growth. As a result of these intentional conversations, I was inspired me to meet with other younger Christian women, encouraging them in the faith and walking together with them through life's challenges. Even after graduating from college, I made it a priority to always look for spiritual mentors and younger disciples to learn with me in accountable friendships.

Years later, as a missionary in Thailand, I became friends with asylum seekers and refugees while attending Christ Church (Anglican) Bangkok. When deciding a research topic for my Doctor of Ministry degree, I was interested to learn how these asylum seekers and refugees were discipled in their home countries and how their understanding of spiritual growth changed while at Christ Church and when they were resettled in other countries. This thesis is the result of my research.

I used an interpretive phenomenological approach to listen to my asylum seeker and refugee friends explain how they exercised their faith in their home countries. I also asked how they found meaning in their faith as members of Christ Church Anglican

Church in Bangkok. Two of my interviewees were resettled to third countries, and I learned how they exercise their faith in their new countries. I wanted to know what each person thought of their spiritual growth at the different phases of their migration.

I learned that most of the asylum seekers and refugees regularly attended churches and fellowship meetings where there were meaningful activities for them to learn about the Bible, to pray and to serve others. Those whom I interviewed were active at Christ Church in a variety of ministries and found happiness and purpose in their church roles. Many of them had clear ideas of what it means to be a Christian disciple and have actively sought out opportunities to bless others.

I was encouraged when interpreting the results of the study. I learned what kinds of relationships and opportunities help asylum seekers and refugees to feel connected with the church body. My interviewees continue to inspire me to help the Church function holistically and more inclusively as the body of Christ, making spaces for refugees and asylum seekers to grow in their personal and corporate discipleship while actively serve God.

Mentor: Dr. Michael Woodcock

425 words

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church (Anglican) in Bangkok, Thailand. I feel blessed to know many: some who bravely returned to their home countries, many who still live in Bangkok and others whose lives intersected with mine temporarily but have moved on to other nations. I am inspired by your grace and your passion for Christ.

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” Acts 17:26-27a.

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I want to thank my parents, Dr. Herminio and Phoebe Gamponia, who have always encouraged me to love and serve God. I thank my siblings and in-laws: Jessica, Larry, Melissa, Edgar, Bethann, Debbie, Bryan, Vanessa and Alex for also supporting me and encouraging me to follow the Lord and my passions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, a record number of eighty million people were categorized as displaced migrants, because of social and economic hardship, oppression, violence and climate change.¹ Migration whether forced or elective impacts every sector of society including business, social welfare, education and faith communities. With its strategic location in the heart of southeast Asia and its open economy, the Kingdom of Thailand has been a transit point and destination for hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers from more than forty countries and millions of migrant workers.² Thailand has more than 91,000 refugees from Myanmar living in border camps and an estimated 5,000 urban refugees and asylum seekers in metropolitan areas.³ Christ Church Bangkok has functioned as the body of Christ ministering to the refugee and asylee population in Bangkok as well as being a place for refugees and asylum seekers to engage in discipleship and ministry to others.

1.1 The Gap in Research

Individual Christians and churches around the globe have responded in different ways to the migration crisis. Even though one reason that people risk becoming refugees is for religious oppression or persecution, little has been written about how Christians

¹ David Miliband, *Rescue: Refugees and the Political Crisis of Our Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 8.

² Jerrold W. Huguet and Sureporn Punpuing, *International Migration in Thailand* (Bangkok: International Organization for Migration, 2005), iii-v.

³ “Thailand,” *Refugees*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/thailand.html>.

refugees and asylum seekers maintain their faith or thrive spiritually. Bangkok is a world-class city with a population estimated to be 10.9 million.⁴ In a nation where 94% of the population is Buddhist, how do refugees and asylum seekers find a church to worship, given the language and cultural differences? Christ Church (Anglican) has hosted English worship services since 1864, moving to its current location in Bangkok's Sathorn district in 1904.⁵ For nearly forty years, the church community has supported ministry and relief efforts at Karen refugee camps along the Thai/Myanmar border in northern Thailand.⁶ Being an established congregation with a prominent building in downtown Bangkok, Christ Church has attracted refugee and asylum-seeking Christian families for many years. In 2022, there are approximately twenty refugee/asylum seeker families attending weekly worship services, nearly 75 people, including children.⁷

Refugee and asylum-seeking families are meaningfully engaged in church life, such as serving as teachers and helpers in the children's Sunday school ministry, managing the audio-visual equipment, ushering, welcoming, cooking for weekday fellowship lunches, singing in the church choir, leading and participating in the Alpha ministry. Why have they chosen to be involved at this church? How have these church programs supported their spiritual growth? What does discipleship mean to them? I intend to interview individuals and families, as well as advocates and church leaders in order to write an appreciative inquiry describing how spiritual growth is happening among refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church.

⁴ "World City Populations 2022", *World Population Review*, accessed March 21, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities>.

⁵ Tim Eady, *A Bangkok Book of Seasons and Psalms: Readings and Reflections for the Seasons of the Christian Year* (Bangkok: Esme Books, 2017), 13.

⁶ Eady, *A Bangkok*, 19.

⁷ Bhamuk Bhadaphansorn, LINE message to author, November 17, 2021.

1.2 Purpose: Why Their Discipleship is Important

Through the process of inquiry, participants will share how they understand discipleship and spiritual growth and how they find meaning in church activities.⁸ I will use a constructivist/interpretive framework, listening to how participants interpret their participation and spiritual growth, rather than evaluating their discipleship based on a culturally-specific framework. My goal is not to develop church programs. Christ Church does not keep records of attendance and participation specifically for refugees and asylum seekers, nor does the church have fellowship or discipleship programs exclusively for them. Nevertheless, as an English-speaking Anglican congregation in Bangkok, migrants find the church. No one has written the phenomenology⁹ of their discipleship experiences, but their spiritual growth matters and deserves to be researched.

Like those who attend Christ Church, 60% of the refugees and asylum seekers around the world are urban refugees.¹⁰ Since Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, refugees and asylum seekers cannot become Thai residents, but must be resettled in a third nation. Although some asylum seekers are registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and awaiting repatriation, their movements are restricted: they cannot work legally and are always in fear of raids by immigration officials who may incarcerate them in Immigration Detention Centers.¹¹ The religiously oppressed or persecuted asylum seekers at Christ Church may be required to wait for ten years before repatriation. In the interim, how are they using their time? It is written in Acts 16:26-27 (ESV, 2016):

⁸ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 243.

⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th Edition (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 268.

¹⁰ Miliband and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 21.

¹¹ Michaelle Tausen, *Seeking Asylum in Bangkok, Thailand: Surviving, Coping, and the Wellbeing Strategies of Palestinian-Syrian Refugees* (PhD diss. University of Sussex, 2016), 13-14, <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/66361/>.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.¹²

Asylum seekers at Christ Church believe that God brought them safely to Thailand, so that they would be able to worship freely as Christians while waiting for resettlement in a third country. However, they did not imagine that the process could take so long. Many are hoping to relocate to Canada, so worshipping at an English-speaking church in Bangkok is a positive step in that direction. Bangkok is a well-developed, international city with most public signs written in Thai and English. While internationals may learn to speak some Thai, it may be more astute for refugees and asylum seekers to learn English. Engaging in the variety of church programs in English enables refugees and asylum seekers to strengthen their faith and contribute to the worshipping community.

1.3 The Questions

I will explore the central research question of how asylum seekers understand discipleship and spiritual growth.

The key research questions for this qualitative study are:

- 1) How did refugees and asylum seekers exercise faith in their home countries?
- 2) How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise their faith in Bangkok and in their current countries (if they have been resettled to a third country or returned to their home country)?

¹² All biblical passages are quoted from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles, 2016).

- 3) How do refugees and asylum seekers perceive and evaluate their growth as followers of Christ?

1.4 Definition of Terms

For this inquiry, key terms are used with the following definitions.

1. Advocate: Critical partners who intentionally befriend refugees and asylum seekers on behalf of the Life Raft International, a Christian foundation. The mission of LRI is to hold refugee families accountable to their goals, finding their purpose in Bangkok.¹³
2. Alpha Ministry: Christ Church Bangkok regularly hosts the Alpha Course as an introductory discipleship class. Participants watch a series of short videos together, providing a springboard for dialogue about the Christian faith, life and purpose.¹⁴
3. Asylum seeker: A displaced person who has applied for resettlement with the UNHCR and whose application for sanctuary is undergoing review.¹⁵
4. Diaspora Missiology: A Lausanne gathering on Diaspora Ministry in Seoul, Korea in 2009 defined Diaspora Missiology as “a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God’s redemptive mission among peoples living outside their places of origin.”¹⁶ It includes ministry to migrants including refugees and asylum seekers.

¹³ “Overview,” (Bangkok: Life Raft International, 2018), 2.

¹⁴ “Alpha Community,” accessed March 21, 2022, <https://www.christchurchbangkok.org/page/33/alpha>.

¹⁵ “Asylum Seeker,” UNHCR, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugees.html>

¹⁶ Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology* (Langham Creative Projects), location 944.

5. Discipleship: Martin Manser explains discipleship as following the teachings of Jesus Christ, becoming more like God through spiritual discipline and receiving His grace and blessings preferably in a like-minded community.¹⁷
6. Growth: Spiritual growth is the natural and dynamic development of individuals maturing in community to reflect the kingdom of God. Biblical imagery of growth includes babies, seeds and fruit trees.¹⁸
7. Migrants: This word refers to individuals and families relocating to another region or nation in order to improve their living conditions and economic prospects, without factors such as persecution or war compelling them to relocate.¹⁹
8. Refugee: The legal definition from the UNHCR is: *Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.*²⁰
9. Universal Declaration of Human Rights: This document was drafted by the UN in 1948 as a description of the fundamental rights afforded all people regardless of culture or origin.²¹

UNHCR: In 1950, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was founded to support Europeans who were displaced as a result of World War 2. The commission was given three years to complete the task of refugee resettlement, but it became evident that this task would be a never-ending challenge.²²

¹⁷ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes*, Ebook by – Hoopla, accessed March 19, 2022, <https://www.hoopladigital.com/play/11744274>, location 8114.

¹⁸ Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes*, location 8443.

¹⁹ “Migrant,” *Glossary on Migration* (Geneva: IOM, 2004), 40.

²⁰ “Refugee” UNHCR, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugees.html>.

²¹ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

²² “History of UNHCR,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html>.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study is focused on discipleship, so I did not document the reasons for or the status of participants' migration. Some of the participants of this inquiry have overstayed their visas and are in the process of seeking asylum with the UNHCR. Some are considered illegal from the perspective of the Thai government. Participant names and identifying descriptions are not disclosed. Participants include regular and occasional worshippers at Christ Church from a variety of different nations. I conducted interviews with individuals whose families have been repatriated to a third country. I had intended to include families who returned to their home countries, but when I reached out to two families, they declined to be interviewed.

A personal limitation was my inability to understand interviewees in their native languages. Translations could have been challenging, but I had follow-up conversations (phone calls, written messages and meetings) and back-translated when the data was transcribed, in order to clarify ideas.

My personal understanding of discipleship is based how I was taught as college student with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in the United States, which might have to do more with spiritual disciplines and personal Bible study. I did not want my experience of discipleship to influence learning how participants have grown spiritually, but I wanted to understand how they interpret their church activity before migrating, while they live in Bangkok and after they have re-settled in a third country. By analyzing their descriptions of discipleship, I wanted to understand what participants believe a Christian is, how they came to identify with this faith and why it matters to them.

I interviewed former detainees in the Immigration Detention Center about their experiences of worship and support from Christ Church before and during their detention. I consulted with other English-speaking churches in Bangkok about their ministry to

refugees and asylum seekers, as well as Pakistani and Nigerian churches in Bangkok. I interviewed asylum seekers who are Catholic and Muslim, as points of reference.

Interviewees and translators received compensation for their participation. I asked for the counsel and approval from the vicar of Christ Church to create a waiver, protecting participant identities and helping them understand the scope and limitations of my study. I did not want the compensation to be an incentive for participation, so I asked for guidance from the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and others who have done research among similar populations in Thailand in order to avoid potential conflict.

1.6 Significance of the Research

There is a growing body of knowledge about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. Churches around the world have responded by helping and supporting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees at different phases of the journey. It is increasingly common to read refugee stories of survival and later success, but there is still little written about the faith journey of Christian refugees and asylum seekers. Participants will personally benefit from the study by reflecting on their spiritual growth and discipleship and having their stories of faith heard and documented. It will be informative to read of their personal definitions of discipleship, which may encompass much more than mere Bible knowledge. Christ Church leaders will benefit from the inquiry by learning how this diverse population of community members finds meaning in their participation in church activities.

1.7 Overview of this Study

I wrote chapter two as the Literature Review where I interact with Christian scholars concerning the ministry to refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church. Much of the current scholarship is about ministry in North America or Europe, so the majority

of structures are Western in their approach. The ministry in Bangkok, Thailand is unique, in that it is through an Anglican Church located in a predominantly Buddhist nation where Christians are a small minority.

In chapter three of this study, I wrote of biblical and theological foundations for migration and discipleship. I first wrote about migration, because in the context where I minister in Thailand, Christians are still learning about how migration can positively influence worldwide evangelism. I then wrote about migration in the Old and New Testaments and about Diaspora Missiology. I also wrote about cross-cultural discipleship as it applies to refugees and asylum seekers.

In chapter four, I explained the methods and procedures for this study. I interviewed eight units including individuals and couples. The individuals migrated to Thailand with their immediate families. Some were parents of minors; two were young adults who migrated with their parents as children.

In chapter five, I analyzed the results of the interviews using an interpretive phenomenological approach. Several themes emerged including baptism, prayer and Bible study, mental health, denominationalism, liturgy, worship and service.

Chapter six is the concluding chapter where I summarized my research findings of the eight interviews and how the results might influence the ministry to refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church. I also write of potential research ideas to further discipleship among refugees and asylum seekers and all migrants at international churches in cities like Bangkok.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Lausanne Movement

The Lausanne Covenant, published in 1976, is a definitive statement of evangelical theology and practice. The Lausanne Movement (formerly known as the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism LCWE) continues to provide vision and direction for evangelicals, especially regarding missions. World evangelization is the ultimate goal of the movement, which has four functions: intercession, theology, strategy and communication.²³ A global Lausanne gathering took place in Pattaya, Thailand in 2004 where thirty-one challenges to global evangelization were discussed, including diaspora missiology. As Sadira Joy Tira explains,

Diaspora missions is the vision of God for the scattered people to be gathered, and it has been the unseen hands of God through time and through the deliberations and actions of missiologists and practitioners that have brought diaspora missiology to a wider forum and to the global arena of missions.²⁴

One result of the Pattaya meetings was the Lausanne Occasional Paper #55, *Diasporas and International Students: The New People Next Door*. The working committee continues to research diaspora missiology and educate the Church in understanding how to evangelize and mobilize migrants for ministry.²⁵ The ministry to refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church can be described as diaspora ministry.

²³ <https://www.lausanne.org/about-the-movement>, accessed 9/4/2023.

²⁴ Sadira Joy Tira and Yamamori, Tetsunao. *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, Location 17222.

²⁵ Tira and Tetsunao, *Scattered*, Location 746.

Many of them in Bangkok do not know how long they will reside there. Some apply for refugee status as soon as they arrive in Thailand; others are unaware of the process until they meet others who are applying for asylum. In 2016, the urban refugee population in Bangkok was estimated to be 8,000 people predominantly Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Iraqi, Chinese, Somali, Syrian, Vietnamese and Cambodian. Some Pakistani Christians at Christ Church have been in Bangkok for more than ten years with no intention of returning to Pakistan, unless they are deported. Some of them have family members whose applications to the UNHCR were rejected multiple times. Refugees and asylees cannot obtain visas to legally work in Thailand, but they would rather stay than return to their homeland. Some urban refugees are Christians. Unless their paperwork to become refugees has been approved by the UNHCR, they are considered illegal migrants in Thailand.²⁶

2.2 Diaspora Missiology

Enoch Wan was one Lausanne participant in the 2004 meeting. As the title of his book describes, he writes about *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*. In the theory section, he summarizes the world-wide phenomenon of migration and the shift of Christianity from the west to the majority world. In the methodology section, Wan describes diaspora ministry as requiring creative, inter-disciplinary approaches. As practice, Wan explains that the Church needs a better understanding of diaspora theology in order to practice diaspora missions.²⁷ Wan writes case studies of ministries working among Jews, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hispanics in different urban contexts both within the United States and overseas.

²⁶ Sandra ten Zijthoff, *Five ways to improve refugee lives in Thailand today*. <https://asylumaccess.org/5-ways-to-improve-urban-refugee-lives-in-thailand-today/>. Accessed 3/25/24.

²⁷ Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, Western Seminary, 2011), 20.

Wan outlines four points concerning the Jewish diaspora. First, in both the Old and New Testaments, God initiated the diaspora of His people, because they were not faithful. Second, God promised His people that they would eventually return to Israel, after their punishment and repentance. Third, God is fulfilling His covenant to bless the nations where His people are sovereignly sent. Fourth, the blessing of the nations is preparing the way for Christ's second coming.²⁸ Wan asserts that because these concepts are true, then it must also be true that today God is still sovereignly relocating His people to reveal His glory to the nations. When the Church welcomes migrants and diaspora peoples, she is fulfilling the missionary purpose of God.²⁹ Christ Church Bangkok was planted as an expatriate church and has become a worshipping community where asylum seekers can be both members and Christian leaders. The leadership recognizes that God has not only moved the expatriate church members to work in Bangkok, but He also moved the asylum seekers to Bangkok for a season where they can grow as disciples serving in the body of Christ.

Wan writes that ministry to and through diaspora peoples aids in fulfilling the Great Commission in seven significant ways. First, it is financially sustainable. People can minister to refugees without leaving their regular jobs and raising financial support. The challenge with ministry to asylum seekers at Christ Church Bangkok is that some asylees have not found regular, gainful employment, since they cannot obtain work permits due to their migration status. Unfortunately, this causes them to be financially dependent on sponsors through organizations such as Life Raft. When possible, church members can help asylees to look for opportunities to work and be compensated for their service, such as cleaning, gardening, helping with maintenance, cooking or childcare.

²⁸ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 60.

²⁹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 108.

Second, Christians can minister to diaspora people who are in their own cities and towns without moving overseas. This is the case for Christ Church which is an expat church with a growing asylum-seeking population. Once people build trust with urban asylum seekers, the only barriers are personal.

Third, there are few social and governmental regulations, because visas are not required. Asylee ministry in Bangkok is mostly done through English-speaking churches. The greater Thai Church is not yet active in ministry to asylees. The Thai Church is less than one percent of the overall population, and Christian leaders do not overtly promote refugee ministry or speak out to legislate on behalf of refugees in Thailand. One staff person at Bangkok Bible Seminary explained to me that the Thai Church does not want to speak out on this issue, because it could negatively affect the church's ability to operate peacefully as a minority religion.³⁰ Those who work in refugee ministry are largely expats who are required to obtain visas and work permits, which may be denied if the holders act against or protest the government.

Fourth, Christians can partner with others (churches and organizations) who have shared Kingdom values. It is always helpful to network with other believers who can provide different gifts and opportunities for diaspora peoples. Life Raft is such a ministry to asylum seekers in Bangkok. Through Life Raft, churches can pool resources and learn from one another about how to serve the asylee population. Life Raft personnel are connected to various churches around the city and train liaisons to educate and support advocates for families seeking asylum. There are human rights organizations, including the UNHCR, Amnesty International and Christian individuals in these organizations, who regularly petition the Thai government to change its policies regarding refugees and right to work laws.

³⁰ Personal conversation with Bangkok Bible Seminary staff members, 5/18/2022.

Fifth, all Christians can serve in their areas of passion and ability, and do not need to be highly qualified experts. Some Christ Church members serve asylees by reviewing primary grade educational workbooks for children who do not attend schools or by reading English storybooks to kids when they attend church. Others are able to teach how to read music or play the piano. Life Raft advocates may simply meet with their asylee families for lunch after Sunday service each month to pray with and encourage them.

Sixth, diaspora peoples can engage in Kingdom work, including serving in creative-access communities. One Pakistani asylum-seeking family at Christ Church has regular zoom worship with their extended family in Pakistan, where the teens are also involved by leading songs and reading scripture.

Finally, diaspora ministry leads to effective discipleship, encouraging everyone to serve the body of Christ.³¹ Nearly all of the refugees and asylum seekers that I interviewed were serving in some capacity at Christ Church. Not only did their active participation encourage them spiritually, but they were contributing to the edification of the whole church, being activated in nearly all of the church ministries.

Wan concludes that the church must confront the two demographic realities of the current era by strategically mobilizing Christians from the majority world to minister to migrant peoples.³² Ministry to and through the diaspora can best be done by effective discipling all believers to know and steward their spiritual gifts, using them to build up the body of Christ. Through personal interactions, leaders at Christ Church can learn about asylees' interests and help them to find appropriate positions to serve in the church. Asylum seekers can find joy in their serving and not just in receiving from others. Church leaders can pray regularly with those involved in the ministry; they could also provide on-going ministry training for new and seasoned workers, including biblical teaching,

³¹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 186.

³² Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 186.

ministry activity debriefing and spiritual accountability. Leaders should focus on relationships in their ministries, since most asylees are from cultures that are highly relational, rather than technology-driven or results-oriented. With a clear diaspora missiology, partnerships can develop which empower asylum seekers to reach out to those new to the church and those who are yet unreached.³³

2.3 Migration and the Making of Global Christianity

In his book *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*, Jehu J. Hanciles theologizes that Christianity became a world religion as the result of migration, and therefore “every migrant is a potential missionary.”³⁴ He writes that Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have three common factors. First, one man taught the pathway to God and how all humanity can relate to Him. Second, God benevolently extends grace to all people who seek after Him. Third, the faithful gather in local communities which connect across geography into international networks.³⁵ Both Christianity and Islam envision worldwide evangelization and multiethnic worship.³⁶ Not only is it important for cross-cultural evangelism to expand the faith into new people groups, but Henciles writes that new cultures, with their unique expressions of the faith, also bring the gospel to a fuller expression that cannot be understood in isolated communities. He expands on this idea from Andrew Walls who writes, “The representations of Christ by any one segment of human society are partial and impaired. All the representations are needed for the realization of the full stature of Christ. Migration, therefore, does more than facilitate the cross-cultural expansion of the Christian movement; it often provides the impetus for historic transformations of the faith.”³⁷

³³ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 419.

³⁴ Jehu J. Henciles, *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*, Location 203.

³⁵ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 1116.

³⁶ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 1116.

³⁷ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 1524.

Henciles explains that being a migrant-outsider is a “theologizing experience”, where one can uniquely experience God’s providence and redemption.³⁸ Leaving one’s homeland reflects the experience of Israel in the Old Testament: a people who were called to the Sovereign Lord before they were given land in which to dwell. God’s people would be known not for the vastness of their land or their political or military power, but by their dependence on God.³⁹ When God gave them the promised land, He made it clear that land was His, and God’s people would always be strangers and sojourners with Him (Lev. 25:23). They were then to treat foreigners and others with justice and mercy, inviting them to live in God’s ways (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6; 66:18-21).

As the son of God, Jesus too experienced life as a migrant when his family left Bethlehem to live in Egypt shortly after his birth. Henciles describes, “Jesus, uniquely God’s Son, personified the people of God; and in his life, like the people of Israel, the migrant experience was linked to divine purpose.”⁴⁰ Because Jesus began life as an outcast, today’s asylum seekers are able to relate to him in a powerful way. Especially for those who left their homelands because of religious persecution, moving is out of obedience to God, to experience His protection and provision. As biblical Christians, many want freedom to worship Jesus Christ, the Son of God, without limitations mandated by authorities where there is another national religion. Some might not understand the call to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, among other *ethne*, but with discipleship, they will understand God’s heart for the nations.

The writer of Hebrews describes the Old Testament faithful as those who saw themselves as “strangers and exiles on earth” and promotes them as role models for Christians (Hebrews 11:13). Peter addresses his readers as “elect exiles” which has the same Greek meaning as temporary residents or refugees (1 Peter 1:1). While a person’s

³⁸ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2074.

³⁹ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2341.

⁴⁰ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2616.

country of origin is important in every day geopolitical and social contexts, in the eternal, spiritual context, what matters is a person's relationship with God – and worshipping the King of creation and Sovereign Lord. Paul writes that Christians have “citizenship in heaven” and therefore live according to a different standard (Philippians 3:20). Henciles refers to the second century epistle from Mathetes to Diognetus, stating that Christians conduct themselves as “transients; they take their full part as citizens, but . . . also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country.”⁴¹ Biblical Christians have a keen sense of otherness, because their true homes are with Christ in heaven.⁴² They intentionally build communities of faith which are counter-cultural to mainstream society. From these Christian communities, migrant Christians have potential to theologize and missiologize their experiences and carry the faith to the ends of the earth.⁴³

All of the asylum seekers at Christ Church Bangkok that I interviewed were Christians before leaving their home countries. Several actively served in their home churches in a variety of ways. Most had prior biblical teaching: they knew they were created in God's image to worship and serve Him and His people. None of them had prior theological training or the sense that God was calling them to be missionaries to Thailand. They were keenly aware of their minority status in nations whose governments are opposed to the expansion of the Christian church. They opted to leave their nations in order to worship freely and to find economic opportunities which were not available to them, because of their religion. The Catholics imagined that they would be able to find churches in which to worship while in Bangkok, since the liturgy is universal regardless of language. They were relieved and happy to find English-speaking Catholic and

⁴¹ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 3204.

⁴² Henciles, *Migration*, Location 3497.

⁴³ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 3783.

Protestant churches where they could continue to worship in a learned language, even if it wasn't their mother-tongue.

As a missions mobilizer, I have had opportunities to worship in multiple countries in diverse communities of Christian leaders and missionaries who all choose to live and ministry in order to see Revelations 7:9 become a reality. None of the asylum seekers at Christ Church migrated with this vision of going to unreached communities in Bangkok. They are looking to preserve their faith and have better economic opportunities. Henciles writes that these same asylum seekers have a role in offering a fuller expression of worship not just to the Christ Church community or the Church in Thailand, but to the Church universal. I believe that the pastoral staff have sensed this without stating it explicitly. The leadership needs to go beyond saying that all are welcome, to promoting Henciles' missiology that the worldwide church intentionally integrate all believers into the life and ministry of the congregation, discipling and supporting asylum seekers as well as expatriates to exercise their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole church. The church leadership has to change the focus of not just ministering to the asylum seekers but discipling the asylum seekers, along with expats and Thai Christians, to minister to all nations in greater Bangkok.

Prior to their moves, the asylum seekers did not think that they would live in Bangkok for more than a few years. They sensed that they could manage life temporarily within marginalized communities in Bangkok and hoped that they could being granted status as refugees to move permanently to a developed country where they could work. Some had heard about the work of the UNHCR. One interviewee did not know anything about the UNHCR before moving to Thailand. Even for those who knew about the UNHCR, the asylees had no idea of Thailand's history of detaining Cambodian and Burmese refugees in border camps or its non-signatory status to the UN Refugee Convention. They had no idea that they would be unable to legally work.

For many years, in the church bulletin, Christ Church was described as a “Spiritual oasis in the heart of the city.” Mary Vongsuly is a long-term church member who noted that while she has actively taught, disciplined, advocated and blessed many asylum-seeking families, she was curious to hear me describe Christ Church as a migrant church rather than an expat church, wondering how others describe Christ Church today.⁴⁴ Christ Church’s charter was to be an expat church for English speakers. It is not an ethnic church, but one which has a multi-ethnic population. The Thai congregation which meets at Christ Church is under the Singaporean diocese, but the English congregation must have a vicar from the UK, Australia or New Zealand.

Mary shared that she does not want any single party within the church to make it difficult for the others to feel welcome. She stressed the sacredness of the liturgy, which unites current believers in all of their diversity to the celebrants of the Anglican faith globally and historically.⁴⁵ Mary’s reflections on the church have a deep understanding of Christ Church history and Anglican theology. Like other members of the church, she is curious to see how the church evolves in outreach, discipleship and community life.

2.4 The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora

In his book, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*, Amos Yong shares thoughtful insights on migration and emerging Asian and Asian American theologies. Yong writes that the first generation which moves is more likely to strengthen their religious activity after their relocation. Ministry to immigrants is fruitful, because of their piqued enthusiasm to engage in a faith community.⁴⁶ Because they left other social venues behind, immigrants are searching for

⁴⁴ Mary Vongsuly, Personal Conversation, 5/27/23.

⁴⁵ Vongsuly, Personal Conversation, 5/27/23.

⁴⁶ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings From the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP, 2014), 118.

new communities where they can speak in their native tongue and share common cultural traditions. Religious institutions are often places where migrants can exercise influence and be respected for their age and life experiences.

Some of Yong's theories are true for refugees and asylees at Christ Church. Some expressed that they are more active in Christ Church than they were at their churches in their home countries, where they had work and extended family obligations. There, most had less time to be leaders at church. In Bangkok, the refugee community is unable to secure work visas; they have the time to worship and serve in church. Many are taking advantage of the opportunities to serve in the church, rather than merely attending church. The opportunity to serve with children or help with meal preparations gives them a sense of purpose and dignity.

Yong writes that the apostle Paul was a migrant evangelist who has a vision for nurturing people who would lead the new churches.⁴⁷ This is not unlike the role that the Christ Church vicar plays. While they may not be migrant evangelists, while they are stationed in Bangkok, their role is to nurture the members of the congregation in order to reach the nations within their spheres of influence. The past and current vicars understand the strategic role of blessing Christian asylees, so that they can be a blessing to friends and neighbors, including other asylees, in Bangkok. In the past, Vicar Matthew had the opportunity to join ministry teams in Pakistan, a majority Muslim nation from which Christians notably flee to Bangkok and apply for asylum through the UNHCR. His commitment to asylees at Christ Church affirms Yong's teaching that by discipling asylees, he is engaging people groups to take part in the Great Commission who do not have similar opportunities for growth in their home countries.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 175.

⁴⁸ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 181.

Writing from a Pentecostal-Evangelical perspective, Yong explains a unique privilege which migrants have in understanding the Trinity. It is considered an honor when God calls missionaries to leave their home cultures to share the gospel in communities with less access to biblical teaching. Why is it not considered as honorable when Christian migrants are called out of their home cultures to seek refuge in cities where the gospel has not taken root? These Christian migrants, who understand their missiological potential, honor the living God by leaving behind their home cultures to humble themselves as aliens in foreign nations, depending on God to be their spiritual family and spiritual home, wanting only the regular experience of worshipping the living God who is sovereign over the nations.⁴⁹ When I interviewed refugee and asylees at Christ Church, most had not yet come into a vision of being a missionary to Bangkok. However, if they were discipled to understand that God wants them to be witnesses to all peoples, they may begin to see their role in the church family differently. Some of them may try to learn more Thai language, so that they could witness to Thai people better. Some of them may learn to speak Burmese or Cambodian, to reach out to these populations within Bangkok.

Yong makes a point of the necessity of reconstructing theology in order for all believers to embrace all roles in the Great Commission.⁵⁰ Those who are faithful must learn to engage in evangelism, missions and social service ministry as those who go, send, mobilize, welcome and pray. At Christ Church, asylees must be nurtured to serve, not just being recipients, but also ministers in the congregation and outside of the church. Some asylum seekers are engaged, learning about spiritual gifts and helping with the children's ministry. Those who are baptized as adults have the opportunity to share their testimonies in the worship service, encouraging the church family with their faith experiences. It is

⁴⁹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 184.

⁵⁰ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 185.

the role of the leadership to not only invite all church members to find their place in service, but to teach on the priesthood of believers, applying theology in their lives and communities. Pockets of living faith have emerged within families and ethnic communities of asylees. Within their respective ministries, asylum seekers are seen as church leaders, including the children's ministry, welcome table, communion preparation and ushering. More explicit emphasis can be made that these church members are building a representative and inclusive church community. In this way, asylum seekers can redeem their time in Bangkok.

Yong concludes, "In short, Christian initiation and conversion involves not just a turning away from the world and turning to God but also constitutes God's ways of purifying, transforming and redeeming the world in all of its complexity."⁵¹ No matter what our status is in the eyes of governments, in God's sight, all are sinners. Those who have been redeemed must use their lives to share the redemption story with others. The asylees and refugees who are using their spiritual gifts to serve the congregation at Christ Church, in their humble way, are good examples to those of us who work and have secure meals and housing. They are redeeming the time by worshipping and encouraging others, living out their discipleship and being hope-bearers to all in the church.

2.5 Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures.

In his book *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures*, A.H. Mathias Zahniser writes that effective cross-cultural discipleship includes re-imagining rituals.⁵² He focuses on symbols and ceremonies in cross-cultural discipling, because people around the world express their religious practice in rituals. Some western churches attempt to disregard religious ceremonies, because early Christians wanted to appropriate

⁵¹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 235.

⁵² A. H. Mathias Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures* (MARC, 1997), 2.

freedom in worship apart from Jewish or Catholic ceremonies and legalism. Consequently, Western Protestant missionaries may neglect the importance of signs and ceremony when evangelizing, discipling and church planting today, because they want converts to experience freedom from religious bondages.

Zahniser dispels three common misconceptions about discipleship. Discipleship is not only about individuals knowing and worshipping God: discipleship also engages communities of faith who worship and serve the kingdom of God together. It is not just focused on disseminating truth, but following Christ is also about integrating gospel teaching into the believers' lives. Finally, disciple-makers should not only use principles and practices from their Christian traditions, but they can also effectively integrate customs and celebrations from the local culture and spiritual practices.⁵³ Christ Church has few individual asylees, more often asylees come to Christ Church as families. Meaningful discipling will affect families, and so it is good when whole families come to church to worship together. But service is another key component in discipleship. Because the church has so many different ministries, whole families can be engaged and serve the Lord together. In the Sunday school class which I taught for kids from 11-14 years, students enjoy being enlisted as helpers: passing out materials or snacks and even translating for those from their ethnic group who are uncomfortable speaking English or who are shy. Initially, I misunderstood why kids were whispering or talking while I was teaching and explaining ideas and procedures. But when I learned that some were translating for their friends, I made space for them to bless their peers, because I could not speak their language.

There are ways that Christ Church perpetuates the Western mentality that faith is cerebral. Members typically gather on Sundays, and they might only connect with small groups or ministry teams only in preparation for weekly or monthly gatherings. Presently,

⁵³ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 22.

because of social media, communication can happen multiple times per day to encourage one another, share prayer requests and ministry/personal needs. Asylees live dependent on God's grace and His provision through social service agencies and occasional giving from independent sponsors. They live out their faith in authentic ways - having left their homes, their jobs and extended families in their home countries. It can feel trite for me to encourage them to trust in God, when in comparison, they have fewer personal resources on which to depend.

I have yet to see Christ Church share neutral, cultural practices from Iran, Pakistan or Sri Lanka to help all church members grow in applying their faith. One Pakistani youth who plays the guitar for the teens Sunday School classes could teach songs in Urdu for the congregation to sing together. Or alternately, other Urdu speakers could translate their worship songs back into English for the church to sing, adding to our worship experience. I remember asking a Pakistani choir member if the song, "The Blessing" based on Numbers 6:22-27 was translated into Urdu. At the time when the church was singing that worship song, it had not yet been translated. We asked the choir member if they were willing to translate it, and they questioned why, since they liked singing songs in English more than singing in Urdu. I regret that we did not push them to help us with a translation, because having the words in their mother tongue might bless other Urdu or Hindi speakers in the congregation.

Beyond multi-lingual worship, Christ Church could institute prayer and fasting days redeeming the Pakistani holiday of Ashura - remembering when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt or when the asylees journeyed to Thailand, rather than commemorating a Shia prophet's murder. Similarly, on the church's birthday, more could be done to recognize the church's unity, inclusive of people from different cultures. In the past, there have been worship services where people who spoke different languages were asked to come to the front of the church and share a common phrase in their mother

tongue. Something like this could be done every year to celebrate congregational unity in the midst of many tribes and tongues. It would be something to remember – looking forward and looking back to changes and constancy of our heritage in Christ.

2.6 Intercultural Discipleship

In *Intercultural Discipleship*, W. Jay Moon writes that churches could form phenomenological groups in order to develop new forms of worship which would be relevant to the cultures present.⁵⁴ Those who disciple others at Christ Church and understand the Anglican service could learn about the worship forms used in the different cultures of church members, adapting these forms according to what is available in Bangkok and explaining its meaning for how Christ Church would use this new form. Those considering these new forms of worship must examine each symbol used, aware of primary and secondary meanings in the different cultures represented in the church. An example would be how during the covid-19 pandemic, Christ Church had to consider how to symbolize communion by sharing the one cup of blessing while using individual cups. In the weeks that the church first re-opened, the vicar was careful to explain for many weeks how the many individual cups were still collectively one cup.

Moon writes further that when evaluating worship, the church leaders should ask representative church members how they understand the function of a ritual or form. The leaders could ask church leaders and regular members, “What would happen if this ritual were no longer practiced?”⁵⁵

As William J. Abraham defines it, “Discipling is that ongoing set of intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God through appropriate instructions, experiences, symbols, and ceremonies.”⁵⁶ Zahniser elaborates

⁵⁴ W. Jay Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 122.

⁵⁵ Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 122.

⁵⁶ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 23.

that cross-cultural discipleship is dependent on the Holy Spirit to integrate the spiritual truth of God as the ultimate Creator in Genesis 1 and cultural understanding of God as intimate Companion in Genesis 2.⁵⁷ New converts need truth encounters to submit their theological and spiritual understandings to the Sovereign, Creator God. They need empirical encounters to balance modern science with local wisdom. They also need power encounters to integrate folk beliefs and traditions affecting their everyday lives, such as sickness/health, seasons/weather disruptions and good/bad luck.⁵⁸ The last encounter is referred to as the excluded middle and can be difficult to integrate, especially for Western missionaries who work among majority world cultures. Often these missionaries do not understand folk beliefs in fate and luck, so they do not effectively teach converts to deal with resulting issues. The new converts then practice a split-level faith where they seek answers to cultural questions from their prior practice while trusting their high religion and spiritual concerns to Christianity.⁵⁹

Moon further explains that relating local stories to biblical stories helps believers to understand excluded middle issues of culture. When local proverbs and fables are compared and contrasted to biblical principles and characters, people develop a Christian worldview, which is the goal of discipleship.⁶⁰ When asylees are discipled in small groups, they should be given the opportunity to tell cultural stories and fables to the whole group. Then the group can discuss together the biblical reality or distortions that are assumed or upheld in the story. This could also be done in Sunday school settings, giving asylees and people from different countries the opportunity to share fables and legends from their cultures and together with others look for ways that the underlying teaching aligns with scripture. My friends used to do this informally after watching

⁵⁷ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 51.

⁵⁸ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 53.

⁵⁹ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 55.

⁶⁰ Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 136.

movies. It was helpful to talk over movie characters, how other characters were Christ-like or how they could have made decisions differently. I eventually used these critical evaluating skills to host a Pokemon outreach to middle school students in Boston's Chinatown – my first experience in contextualization. Zahniser emphasizes that cross-cultural discipleship includes,

[O]ngoing initiation into the kingdom of God by instruction, experience, symbols, and ceremonies. Initiation implies a real “entering in” to an experience for the first time. It also implies a *real* entering in, in the sense that initiation into an organization creates members who belong. Initiation suits discipling, if we considering discipling a process of entering – an ongoing series of initiations – into the reality of the kingdom. Disciplers provide believers with lessons, experiences, symbols, and ceremonies, facilitating their deeper and deeper entrance into truth and life of the kingdom.⁶¹

Effective cross-cultural disciple-makers teach believers to harmonize every aspect of their lives with the gospel of Christ. The goals are for believers' ways of thinking and spiritual practices to be transformed, as well as their emotions and inclinations. Sunday worship is the entrance to a lifestyle of discipleship, where there is clear biblical teaching. Believers see Christian symbols everywhere in the Christ Church sanctuary: stained glass pictures of biblical characters and ideas, the cross, candles, the Bible. When liturgy is shared, the community participates in the worship, acknowledging and affirming the faith. The experience of communion also points to Christ, His suffering and victory at the cross. We remember our communion with Him. And then, Christ Church members are exhorted to leave the congregation, “to go forth to love and serve the Lord.”⁶² To get to know other church members as disciples, we must invite them to small groups or spend intentional time with them outside of the church and church meetings, inviting them home to share meals, watching and talking about movies together and interacting in other constructive ways to build the relationship.

⁶¹ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 62.

⁶² *A Service Book*, 58.

Disciple-makers at Christ Church should include active learning, symbols and rituals to help younger Christians constantly be reminded that they have been born-again into the kingdom of God.⁶³ For example, consider the Jewish tradition of Sabbath. The Shabbat is filled with signs and ceremony, where Jews light candles, prepare meals ahead of time, recite specific prayers at certain times of the day. Protestant missionaries who work with Jewish converts must take care to show them how to integrate good Shabbat practices on Sundays: not just attending community worship meetings and then going shopping or to athletic events, but also preserving the traditions which can be used to glorify the risen Messiah who has come and will return. Larry Shinn explains that ceremonies are active expressions of religious signs, and disciplers need to empower Majority World converts to create new rituals and ceremonies to express their faith in the local context.⁶⁴

One asylee family regularly serves the Christ Church community in different ways. When I asked the parents, they explained that they honor the Sabbath as a family through gathering and serving in worship. They won't wash their clothes or labor as a way of keeping the Sabbath holy as a family.⁶⁵ I cannot remember a specific teaching from the pulpit about Sabbath-keeping, but perhaps some acknowledgement of how asylee families can honor the Sabbath over other days would be helpful for all Christ Church families, those who work gainfully, and those who do not. The liturgy and parts of the worship could be explained, as well as things that members might rest from in order to focus specifically on God. Maybe asylee families would be challenged to not use the internet on the Sabbath, but rather to have a special time of family prayer and Bible study together. Or it could be a day when family members write letters or emails to extended family members in other countries to maintain relationships.

⁶³ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 62.

⁶⁴ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 75.

⁶⁵ P3 Interview.

There is a risk that new rituals become idols where believers use the signs not to lead them to deeper worship, but as magic doorways used to manipulate God.⁶⁶ Ritualism can become a substitute for experiencing God's presence. Cross-cultural disciplers must be aware of this tension and help new believers to connect rituals and ceremonies with worship and humbly entering into God's presence. An effective construct in new Christian cultures is indigenous worship music. Biblical praise accompanied by locally produced music transports believers into the presence of God in powerful ways. Believers can more easily remember biblical concepts and reflect on their faith when they have indigenous worship songs.⁶⁷

I am sure that some of the asylees at Christ Church beautifully express their worship in their native languages. The disciplers at Christ Church can actively encourage their disciples to express their worship and spiritual gifts in their own way. They could encourage them to share songs, poems and art in their small groups, the women's fellowship meetings and even with the gathered congregation for Sunday worship. One asylee mentioned that as a child in their home church, they enjoyed reciting psalms during the weekly worship service. This could be incorporated in various gatherings with recitations in different languages, giving young people a forum for developing communication skills and expressing themselves in a way that edifies others.

Baptism is a symbol of burying our old self and rising to new life in Christ. Zahniser recommends other establishing rituals of separation, transition and reintegration into the new faith community.⁶⁸ He explains that having rites of passage give space for personal and communal reflection. At natural rhythms of transition, entering or finishing school, beginning adolescence, entering the world of work, marriage and re-location, Christian communities can implement activities marking transition and reintegration back

⁶⁶ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 76.

⁶⁷ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 84.

⁶⁸ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 93.

into community with a new identity or gifting to present to the body of Christ.⁶⁹ Zahniser recommended asking the following questions to learn how to create a meaningful Christian ritual or ceremony. First, help disciples to explain what they are experiencing. Second, give disciples the time to share their feelings. Third, share examples from the Bible which give them principles for coping with the experience. Fourth, determine how the body of Christ can help through the experience. Fifth, invite the Holy Spirit to make His presence known to all individuals and to the community, and to point the way forward for all to know. Sixth, acknowledge God's love to others.⁷⁰

Affirming Zahniser's writing, Christ Church Bangkok practices the Anglican tradition of baptisms and confirmations. Like all Christian families, asylum-seeking families are happy to have their babies, children and teenagers baptized at Christ Church. Following the denominational liturgy, when baptisms take place, the congregation participates by affirming, "This is our faith. We believe and trust in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."⁷¹ After the vicar baptizes candidates and makes the sign of the cross, the congregation exhorts the newly baptized by saying, "Fight valiantly under the banner of Christ, against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue his faithful soldier and servant to the end of your life."⁷² The congregation later welcomes those baptized by exclaiming, "We welcome you into the Lord's Family. We are members together of the body of Christ; we are children of the same heavenly Father. We are inheritors together of the Kingdom of God. We welcome you."⁷³

⁶⁹ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 97.

⁷⁰ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 101.

⁷¹ *A Service Booklet*, 52.

⁷² *A Service Booklet*, 52.

⁷³ *A Service Booklet*, 53.

2.7 Transitions

In his theories of transition, William Bridges writes that whereas changes are circumstantial, transitions are psychological.⁷⁴ Transitions have an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning.⁷⁵ It would be helpful for a church leader or experienced counselor to lead asylees and even the expats at Christ Church in a Bible Study or workshop where they are invited to acknowledge the losses of their former lives in their home countries and name new elements in their lives to accept as their new reality. They can also be encouraged to define whether they are in a neutral zone and all that might entail, regarding their migration status, family economics, educational and ministry opportunities. Having thoughtfully considered the changes and transitions from their home countries to Thailand, mourning their losses and accepting their circumstances, disciples can express thankfulness and hope. Counselors, disciplers and ministers can help asylees, refugees and expats in the church to acknowledge God in their current situations. When able to see God and praise Him in difficult circumstances, we confirm that we have a living hope and that we depend on God more than our own abilities. There are ways that asylees depend on God in ways that may be more similar to the psalmists and first century disciples than Christians with government-issued visas and well-paying jobs. Refugees' experiences with God can be a great encouragement to others, and so the church must be invested in their spiritual growth and personal development.

Zahniser expands further on transition theory and how it relates to Christian discipleship. "If disciplers make use of every possible transition in the life of believers and their communities for bonding to Christ, their discipling will likely succeed."⁷⁶ Alternately, when Christian disciplers ignore the structures and rites which traditional faiths use to convey relevance, truth and priorities, then they may miss opportunities for

⁷⁴ William Bridges and Susan Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* (New York: Hachett, 2019), Location 125.

⁷⁵ Bridges and Bridges, *Transitions*, Location 211.

⁷⁶ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 98.

authentic discipleship. When disciplers create new or appropriate known religious rites-of-passage and other structures to teach truth, then these lessons can be kinesthetically sealed upon the hearts of the disciples. The disciples will recognize the sacredness of the rite or ritual. Performing the rite or ritual it will enable them to harmonize their lives and their faith under Christ's shalom.⁷⁷

Zahniser explains further that cross-cultural disciplers should help their disciples to articulate when they feel unsettled, confused, and abandoned. When they experience these feelings, the refugees learn to cope by adapting symbols, rituals and fellowship activities to help them "understand the experiences they are going through, talk about what they are feeling, learn the skills and realities they need to know in order to cope effectively, realize the resources available to them through the body of Christ, experience the reality of God's presence and advocacy as Comforter in their lives as individuals and as a community of faith, and express the reality of God in love of neighbor."⁷⁸ Because symbolism is so important in the Anglican context, I think that refugees and asylees at Christ Church have the opportunity to experience healing from past traumas and create new meaning to the lives in Thailand. Many of the interviewees can recite the Lord's prayer and the twenty-third psalm. They have learned to pray these prayers in difficult times, as an affirmation of their faith. They may also learn to message their church friends in a group chat to ask for immediate intercession or help, whatever is needed. They may need to memorize the apostles' creed or to sing songs of faith to encourage their spirits and to clear the negative thoughts in their heads.

Asylees confirmed that they are blessed by church liturgy, taking part in worship services by reciting their affirmations during the call to worship, after scripture readings, during congregational prayers and while celebrating the eucharist. They enjoy the

⁷⁷ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 34.

⁷⁸ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 101.

rhythms of the service, affirming the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds and praying the Lord's prayer together each week. One family was in detention for three years. When they were released, the first service that they attended at Christ Church was the Christmas Eve evening service. One of the adult children in this family mentioned that their favorite worship service in their home country was the Christmas midnight Mass, so being able to attend a Christmas Eve service was especially meaningful after their family was released from the Immigration Detention Center. Another asylum seeker mentioned that even though Christ Church regularly has a traditional service on Sundays at 7:30am, they still hope that Christ Church will host an Easter Sunrise service in Bangkok.

During a Sunday school hour in May 2023, I taught a class sharing my research about discipleship at Christ Church. A church member who recently migrated mentioned that in his country, Protestants were distinct from Catholics, and he had no prior opportunity to mix with other Protestants outside of his Baptist denomination. He requested that Christ Church leaders host a teaching time to explain Protestantism, Anglicanism and the history of Christ Church. He said he still does not know how Pentecostals are different from Baptists and Presbyterians, and why they can all be called Protestant. In the past, a church leader taught about worship and liturgies through the book, *You Are What You Love* by James K.A. Smith.⁷⁹ Having a theological orientation to the church would be very helpful, because few people in the church have roots in Anglicanism. Similarly, few of them know about Christ Church Bangkok in the context of church history in Bangkok and Thailand, and a historic overview of the church would be beneficial to all church members.

Christ Church could also create a ritual or ceremony before the annual church meeting to discuss membership and Christ Church history. A ceremony would help those

⁷⁹ James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2016).

new to the church to integrate into the body and commit everyone to the next year's spiritual journey together as a church family. It might also encourage a sense of mutual ownership and partnership together for the next year. The church could nurture a more communal identity, connecting as families with local and global Christian movements.

Zahniser explains how *shalom* informs the Church's mission. Traditional cultures see everything, personal health, weather, relationships and harvest, as related to spirituality. *Shalom* is acknowledging God's blessing in all that the community confronts, not only in the spiritual realm, but also material realm and in all relationships. The mission of the Church is to increase the *shalom* in its own community and share *shalom* with people who are not experiencing it. This shalom is what traditional cultures are seeking.⁸⁰

One interviewee shared their experience of *shalom* in Bangkok. Although their family was materially poor when they in Thailand: they felt completely dependent on God. They experienced God and His unexpected provision miraculously through advocates and other sponsors from Christ Church. Zahniser writes that marginalized people live out a pilgrim faith in way that enables them to uniquely identify with the people of Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness and in exile.⁸¹ They also relate to Christ intimately, thinking of when Jesus needed refuge from Herod, experienced rejection from the Temple and society and lived in a posture of complete material dependence on God through others. Now re-settled in Australia, one interviewee's children attend school. They are in job training, along with their spouse. But their *shalom* has been disrupted. Materially, the family is lacking nothing, but they feel a spiritual void, because they have not yet found a community that wants to share *shalom* together. They know that it will

⁸⁰ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 188.

⁸¹ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 204.

take time and will not give up hope, but they are sad that they are not yet experiencing a new shalom in their new country of residence.

Zahniser shares an idea from the teaching of E. Stanley Jones similar to that which Henciles shared from Andrew Walls, “The gospel will not be fully understood until it has taken root in every human culture.”⁸² Asylees from different countries who reside in Bangkok can contribute meaningfully to Christ Church and other fellowships, helping everyone to get a better understanding of God and His Kingdom. Helping asylees to express their faith through symbols and ceremonies in creative worship is a powerful way for all to grow in discipleship.

2.8 Christianity with an Asian Face

Peter Phan writes about the importance of contextual theology and catechesis in *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making*. He summarized the purpose of catechism, which is relevant to discipleship among Asian asylum seekers. Catechism is foundational to the Church’s purpose and is essential for evangelism and mission. The Church’s mission includes “not only verbal proclamation of the good news but also all other activities of the church, such as personal witness of life, preaching, liturgy of the word, sacramental celebrations, popular piety, ecumenical dialogue, fostering social justice, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue.”⁸³ Catechesis is spiritual formation for members, so that they understand biblical teaching and mature as disciple-makers. Churches should contextualize universal catechisms in order for local believers to exercise their faith in their contexts. In contextualizing catechisms, leaders should seek out “ecumenical dialogue, inculturation, and inter-religious dialogue.”⁸⁴

⁸² Zahniser, *Symbol*, 169.

⁸³ Peter Phan, *Christianity with An Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Ossining: Orbis, 2003), 205.

⁸⁴ Phan, *Christianity*, 205.

Christ Church uses the *Energize* curriculum⁸⁵ for the children's Lighthouse Sunday School curriculum by Urban Saints and recommended by the Church of England's Diocese of London. For teens and adults, we most often use the Alpha curriculum, which is a media-based discussion platform for people to ask and answers questions about life and faith. Church members form leadership teams of two or three and serve as discussion leaders for the Alpha topics, which runs for 10+ consecutive weeks. The topics include: *"Is there more to life than this? Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? How can I have Faith? Why and how should I pray? Why and how should I read the bible? How does God guide us? Who is the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do? How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? How can I make the most of the rest of my life?"*⁸⁶ In the past, the church has hosted other Bible studies to disciple and encourage fellowship among church members, including asylum seekers.

The Alpha film series is a video series created in the United Kingdom and used world-wide. Even though the dialogue is in English, Christ Church members have found the videos effective in teaching and encouraging dialogue among members and visitors. After viewing a 20-minute video, participants divide into small groups with no more than eight people. Participants can discuss what they watched in the videos or ask questions about anything related to the weekly topics. Alpha leaders have been church members for more than one year and have usually been through an Alpha course. Sometimes visitors and guests have specific, theological questions which the leader may not be able to answer, but leaders are trained to explain that they can ask an expert or share sources of information to research for themselves. It is essential for the small group leaders to create an open and safe environment for participants to ask and answer questions freely and confidentially.

⁸⁵ Urban Saints, *Energize*, <https://www.energize.uk.net/>, accessed March 30, 2023.

⁸⁶ <https://alphausa.org/preview/alpha-film-series/>. Accessed 7/7/23.

While we do not call the Energize or Alpha Curricula our Christ Church catechism, the Alpha discussions are an opportunity to dialogue about the essentials of the Christian faith. If there is confusion about what the church doctrine is or what Christians believe in general, Alpha is a safe environment to ask those kinds of questions. Asylum seekers at Alpha can also share their experiences about church in their home countries, for others to learn from and be encouraged by their faith and life journeys. Asylum seekers have been small group leaders, administrative helpers and participants of Alpha both in-person and online. There is training for small group leaders and on-going support during the Alpha course. Small groups are assigned, but ethnically diverse. All Christ Church Alpha small groups include church members, seekers and asylees.

2.9 Seeking Shalom in Bangkok

There is an increasing amount of research written about ministry to diaspora populations, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers. Much of the research is written about specific populations who have migrated to nations in the US or Europe. The situation in Thailand is unique, because while it is a developing country, Bangkok is a world-class city with a pluralistic religious environment. Christ Church is a unique institution with a diverse asylum-seeking population. Some asylees have been Christian for generations, while others are new to faith and have fled circumstances where persecution for conversion is allowed. Christian asylees want to be disciples. They want to discover and use their spiritual gifts in a church which accepts them for their unique gifts, personalities and abilities. They are looking for new, godly rituals and activities where their faith is exercised, they are encouraged and where they can also be an encouragement to others. They are seeking *shalom* and want to help other to find *shalom* in Bangkok, and to the ends of the earth. They do this through Bible study fellowships, ushering, singing in the choir, preparing the sanctuary and church grounds

for worship, participating and leading women's fellowships, teaching and assisting in Sunday school classes for children and participating and leading Alpha small groups. These activities engage their minds and their hearts, so that they are spiritually nurtured and learning to serve others.

In the next chapter, I will write of theological and biblical frameworks to consider regarding migration and discipleship.

CHAPTER 3

MIGRATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

In writing theology for discipleship among urban asylum seekers, we must first consider migration as a context for missions. In Bangkok, leaders from various mission-minded churches responded to my inquiry about why they do not minister to urban refugees by explaining that they are illegals, breaking the law by overstaying their visas to enter Thailand as tourists. The Thai churches did not want to engage with the Pakistanis and Iranians, because the work of ministering to Thai nationals was so great.⁸⁷ I wanted them to re-consider, but I understood that they did not have the capacity to minister in English to other people groups in Bangkok. Regardless of the Thai church's stance, it is pertinent to consider what the Bible teaches about migration. If I had the time and platform, I would share the following information with the mission's leaders about the theology of migration, because it has implications for discipleship happening in Thailand.

From Genesis to Revelation, we read that all *ethne* will be blessed, and we see the people of God constantly on the move. God calls individuals from every tribe, tongue, people and language to bring their unique tributes to God's heavenly throne in worship (Rev. 5:9-10, 7:9). While in the past, it was necessary for the Sovereign Lord to create

⁸⁷ Personal conversations with individuals on the Thai Coordinating Team of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 9/3/22.

one tribe – the people of Israel - to bless all tribes, sons and daughters from all tribes are invited to join the eternal, heavenly family of God, through the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The work of this gathered family on earth is to worship: proclaiming the restoration of our broken relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our Mediator, and inviting others to join the family. Most evangelical Christians affirm the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20: we are called to go and make disciples of all nations, welcoming them into the family of faith through baptism, and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. Many agree that the gospel will be preached to all *ethne* before the end times come from Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” What does the Bible say about migrants and refugees as people of God? How can refugees be effectively discipled to obey what Jesus commanded? In this chapter, I will first review Biblical teaching about migrants, then I will share insights in the implications for discipleship among refugees in the 21st century.

3.1 Old Testament Teachings on Migration

Just as in English there are different words to describe aliens, foreigners, migrants or sojourners, in Hebrew there are also multiple words *nēkār*, *tôšāb*, *gēr*, *nokrî* and *zār*. depending on the person’s relationship to the people of Israel. The *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* cites *gēr* as the word most prominently used term in the Old Testament, translated as sojourner or resident alien (Gen 23:4, Lev 23:22, Deut 1:17). Its root form *gûr* means taking up residence or settling down.⁸⁸ The strangers who journey alongside the Israelites are to be treated as though they are fellow Israelites. The people

⁸⁸ Joel B. Green, ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 180.

of God must not withhold justice from them. In today's vernacular, *gēr* may be a resident alien, foreigner, seasonal worker or sojourner. It can be compared to the Greek word *paroikos*, meaning "one who does not belong," or "the other." In addition to the word *gēr*, *paroikos* can include the stranger, the displaced or those who are uprooted.⁸⁹

According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."⁹⁰ Adam and Eve, the first family, were expelled from their home in the Garden of Eden. The narratives of the patriarchs describe them as refugees: Abraham was called out of Ur (Gen ch. 12, Heb 11:9). Jacob fled from his home, for fear of retaliation from his brother Esau (Gen chs. 27-28). Joseph was spitefully sold by his brothers to Egyptian merchants (ch. 37). While God promised to make a great nation from one man, they were not meant to simply enjoy the blessing, they were called to be a blessing to all other nations. Even as migrants, the patriarchs blessed others as they sojourned without a land to call their own. Abram defeated the armies of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and Gooim in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Afterward, Melchizedek the king of Salem blessed Abram and acknowledged the Sovereign Lord (Gen ch. 14). Isaac was blessed in the land of the Gerar, When the Philistines asked him to depart, Isaac re-dug the wells which Abraham had dug. The Philistine king Abimelech asked to make a treaty with Isaac, acknowledging that the Lord had blessed him (26:28-29). God blessed Jacob with many sons and daughters through Leah, Rachel and their maids. Jacob was instrumental in seeing Laban's livestock prosper (30:29-30). In Egypt, God blessed Joseph, who brought blessing to Potiphar's household (Gen.39:1-6) and blessing to the prison where he was sent for the scandal involving

⁸⁹ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 581.

⁹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *What Is a Refugee?* Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>.

Potiphar's wife (39:21-22). Later, Joseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh and was promoted in order to save Egypt and surrounding nations from famine (41:53-57).

God explains why His people should treat strangers and aliens with justice: He delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Lev 19:34, Ex 22:21, 23:9, Deut 5:15, 10:19). As a community without the possibility of owning land in Egypt, they knew what it meant to be treated harshly as slaves. They also knew what it meant to receive comfort and grace through the provision of others, sovereignly directed by God (Pharaoh's daughter raised Moses (Ex 2:9), Jethro welcomed and blessed Moses (2:21), Caleb was a faithful Kenizzite warrior in the party that spied the land of Canaan (Num 32:12); Rahab hid the Israelite spies in Jericho Joshua 2). How much more, when the Israelites were settled in the land given to them by God, should they then treat visitors and strangers with grace and dignity. They should not then become harsh taskmasters to the foreigners in their midst, or like the people of Canaan who followed idols, but instead demonstrate God's attributes of grace, kindness and justice (Lev 18:1-5). When the Israelites obeyed God, their national witness to the surrounding nations was so powerful, that others feared God, and some chose to worship Him (Jos 2:8-13, 1 Ks 10:6-10, Dan 2:47-48, 3:28-29).

In 1980, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism tasked a study group to research and present a paper on refugees to the Consultation on World Evangelism held that year in Pattaya, Thailand. The study group wrote *A Christian Witness to Refugees*, one in a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers. The report explains the refugee situation, the biblical mandate for serving sojourners, the role of the local church, guidelines for responsible social action and a general Christian response to injustice. The report highlights the following scriptures that summarize the biblical commands concerning aliens and foreigners.⁹¹

⁹¹ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization *Lausanne Occasional Paper 5: Christian Witness to Refugees*, 2.

Leviticus 19:33-34 states, “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” God instructs the Israelites to welcome aliens and love them as a family. The motivation is because He is the Lord, the God of the Israelites. They must remember that as a people, the Israelites lived for many generations as strangers in Egypt before the Lord led them to the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In Exodus 12:49, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron how to observe the Passover after leaving Egypt, explaining “There shall be one law for the native and the stranger who sojourns among you.” The Israelites are commanded not to treat the aliens who live among the twelve tribes differently. These strangers journeyed with the Israelites out of Egypt and were settling among them (Ex 12:38).

These *gēr* (aliens, sojourners, strangers) were subject to the same laws and given the same rights as the descendants of Abraham. The same measure of justice was to be used in cases for or against them. Moses further explained that the Lord instructed him to appoint judges with the mandate to “Judge righteously between a man and his brother or alien who is with him” (Deut 1:17).

In gathering their harvests, Moses commands the people of Israel, “You shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the strangers (*gēr*); I am the LORD your God” (Lev 23:22). Israelites were to be compassionate toward the poor and aliens, providing nourishment to those who were unable to provide sustenance for themselves (Ruth 2:2-23).

In Deuteronomy 26:12-13, the Israelites are commanded to give a tithe in the third year not only on behalf of the Levites, but also to the sojourners, widows, orphans who

reside in their towns: “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.’”

When Abraham was commissioned in Genesis 12:3, God vowed to curse those who curse his family. Later Moses instructed representatives from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali to stand at Mount Ebal and pronounce curses upon anyone who “perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut 27:19). The mountain declarations were symbols of God’s watchful providence over his people in the land. By speaking out the blessings and curses, they were affirming that the Lord was their God, and they would follow His ways. They were also inviting God to punish them when they neglected His statutes, when they showed ingratitude to Him by not treating the strangers, orphans and widows with justice and mercy.

In Ezekiel 47:21-23, Ezekiel instructs the Israelites that when they divide their land, the sojourners among them should also have a share. ““So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance,’ declares the Lord GOD.”

In Zechariah 7:9-10, the Lord speaks to the prophet saying that the Israelites are to govern justly, to be merciful and kind and to not take advantage of those without

family, to aliens or to the disadvantaged. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

In Malachi 3:5, God declares that He will pour out His wrath on oppressors, noting those who take advantage of hired workers and those who ignore the needs of the aliens in their communities. “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.”

It is clear from the prophets that God wanted a holy, redeemed people, who - because of their redemption - treated others with justice and love. He would not tolerate idolatry, and He would not allow His people to treat others badly. As Soong-Chan Rah explains, “Part of our call to be a prophetic presence is to advocate for change that benefits the very least of our brothers and sisters.”⁹² The Israelites should treat aliens kindly, because the Lord treated the Israelites kindly. When their leaders or leaders of neighboring countries were mistreating sojourners, then the Israelites did not have permission to ignore the injustice: they were to help those were being oppressed and advocate for more God-honoring relationships (Isa 15:5-16:5, Joel 3:4-8, Am 1:9, 2:1-3, Obad 1:1-15, Nah 3:4-7, Hab 2:6-20).

3.2 Old Testament Ethics and Migration

After re-considering the current migration dilemma through the filter of Old Testament ethics, I believe that the Thai Church would be compelled to minister to

⁹² Rah, Soong-Chan. *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP, Kindle, 2015) Location 1645.

refugees and asylum seekers rather than merely consider them illegals. I write this subsection, to explain how theology and ethics should inform their practice.

Christopher J.H. Wright describes Old Testament ethics based on the triangle of theology (God-centered), sociology (the community of God's people) and economics (the land promised by God). If the Israelites knew and obeyed God, they would follow His teachings in gratitude for what He accomplished in their nation's history. The Israelites worshipped God, because He had already blessed them. Because they knew God, they were compelled to treat the poor, immigrants, orphans and widows with kindness. They also knew that their worship to God would be unacceptable unless they had clean hands and pure hearts (Ps 24:4), implying that they would deal honestly and kindly toward others.⁹³

In describing ethics in the social realm, Wright writes of the unique calling of Israel, God's chosen community. Abraham was not chosen, because he was already a great nation: he was humbly called out of Ur and lived to see only one generation. But through his descendants, God promised to bless all families. The blessing they received was given not just for them to enjoy, and their worship was not meant merely to appease God, but the blessings were given so that the Israelites would model God's justice and righteousness to the nations.⁹⁴

The economic angle of Wright's Old Testament ethics completes the triangle. When Israel was led into the Promised Land after their departure from Egypt, God made it clear that He owned the land; as in Leviticus 25:23, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me." The Israelites were to be stewards of the land, but not without conditions. The Israelites would be held accountable for what they did in and with the land. Earlier in Leviticus 18:28,

⁹³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP, 2004), 45-46.

⁹⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 74.

they were told that if they did not follow God's law, the land itself would reject them, causing them to leave, as it did with the former nation that occupied it. Moses established an economic system for the Israelites which was based on families making a living from the produce of their allotted territory. They were required to show that they trusted in God's sovereign provision by resting on the Sabbath and returning leased property during years of Jubilee.⁹⁵

For the Israelites to worship God as a community of faith was not enough. The Israelites had to show by their lifestyles of holiness and righteousness, in their economic life, including their treatment of strangers and those without families in their midst, that they were a redeemed people. Wright summarizes his ideas about the economic angle regarding Old Testament ethics:

Indeed, the history of Israel in the Old Testament is the story of the land – its promise, gift, abuse, loss and recovery. . . . Israel held two convictions about their land: divine gift and divine ownership. On the one hand, it was the gift of the Lord to them, so they held it securely, provided they remained in covenant relationship with him. But on the other hand, it was still the Lord's land; so he held them morally accountable for their use of the land. Thus the whole realm of Israel's economic life functions as a measurement or gauge of their faithfulness (or otherwise) to the covenant demands of God.⁹⁶

Wright's triangular model of the basis of Old Testament ethics helps readers to understand that theology, sociology and economics were balanced and inter-related. Only one angle was not enough: all three were meant to work in sync. The people of Israel were created to declare the glory of God in pure worship, in holiness as a community and in their daily lifestyles and interactions among other nations.

In addition to his triangular paradigm which explains the basis for Old Testament ethics, Wright writes of other specific ethical and moral teachings. Concerning the law and legal system, he writes specifically about needs and rights. The needs of orphans and widows, the poor, aliens, slaves, debtors and the landless are of greater ethical

⁹⁵ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 97.

⁹⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 98.

importance than legal claims of community members, whose individual and family status were more secure.⁹⁷ The vulnerable should be protected, because of Israel's calling as the people of God, the God of justice and mercy. The paradigm was relational and starkly counter-cultural to other cultures where exploitation was the norm, where money and power were idolized.

Wright offers an approach for applying the Old Testament law as a Christian. First, accept the Old Testament's relevance and authority. Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 that all scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction to help the people of God to understand His ways and be prepared for ministry. If Christians would accept that God commands His people to protect aliens as much as orphans and widows, many more would be involved with social concern ministries for migrants and hold politicians accountable for supporting legislation that helps refugees and asylum seekers.

Second, affirm that the Bible's teaching is internally consistent in its message. Individual laws and narratives are to be understood through the overarching metanarrative that God wants to redeem people from all families, including those who are migrating.

Third, adopt "the priority of grace."⁹⁸ The people of God must learn conscientiously to view every relationship in light of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. It is easier to reject and judge people based on worldly standards than to accept them and encourage their potential. To understand that the Old Testament law was given in covenant relationship with the Holy God helps Christians to affirm and meaningfully apply the teachings of scripture, even in the 21st century. Regarding refugees and migrants, we must look for grace to lead in our treatment of them, rather than to automatically reject them in order to protect nationalistic privileges. As the Israelites

⁹⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 312-14.

⁹⁸ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 316.

were expected to live, Christians must be counter-cultural in the ways we treat strangers in our cities and countries, living in redemptive hope while giving generously to those in need.

Fourth, remember the calling of Israel to be a light to all nations. As faith-descendants of Abraham, believers today are also called to be bearers of truth and salvation to all peoples, including migrants. Fifth, critically evaluate the law in view of Israel's calling. And sixth, remember that for Christians today, the law and the nation of Israel are paradigms, to help address modern examples of injustice toward sex-slaves, victims of human trafficking and the addicted, and seek ways to address these issues in light of Christ's desire to redeem all humanity. Christians should be promoting human rights and basic justice against all forms of evil that exist, including petitioning legislators and holding corporations accountable for unjust practices. Wright's six guidelines are instructive for Christians to understand how to apply the Old Testament law today.

Roy E. Gane summarizes the Old Testament law as God's way to live life: His judgments, standards and teachings. In Deuteronomy 30:16, it is written:

If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

When a person has a personal relationship with the Sovereign Lord, the law makes sense. We understand the law as His personal directives, rooted in His holy character and ways. Obedience to the law means loving the One Who gave the Law, because following Him leads to eternal life. The law teaches God's people how to please Him and how to depend completely on Him for salvation and justice. "Therefore *the Lord* is the comprehensive Law as the standard of justice because 'all of his ways are justice.'"⁹⁹ In the scriptures, the Israelites are given the motivation for following the law:

⁹⁹ Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP, 2017), 18.

because Yahweh is the Lord (Lev 19:34, Numb 15:41). He rescued His chosen ones from slavery in Egypt and demands that they remember their national history and demonstrate the same mercy toward aliens, sojourners, orphans and widows that God showed to them (Deut 6:20-25).

Gane explains that while mercy is commanded in the law, it is difficult to quantify and must be followed by clear descriptions of acts of mercy, such as how to treat aliens, strangers and orphans. Mercy is superior to the law, but it is important to know the various statutes, so that all know if they are fulfilling the law or not.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, Christians follow the Old Testament law in order to become more like the Lord. People who love God follow His laws to build communities of faith to encourage one another and expand His kingdom by sharing their faith and encouraging others to live in worshipful obedience to the Sovereign Lord. It is too easy to see the law only as an obstacle: its written demands include many requirements and restrictions. But the law is from the Lawgiver, who is filled with mercy. While God knows that the law is difficult to follow 100%, he is patient to accept the failures of His people, committing to live among them and building them into a community characterized by justice and righteousness. The law itself was a gift of mercy, enabling people to know God and to know what pleases Him, so that they could use their creative potential to build a new kind of nation. As believers conscientiously obey the Law, they become like Him, in character and wisdom. Following God's law was meant to make His people more compassionate and empathetic to others, attracting and transforming others into the faith.

In his book *Story as Torah*, Gordon Wenham sums up the whole of Genesis in the word blessing (Hebrew *berek, berakah*).¹⁰¹ He writes that the Lord channels His blessings in four ways. First, God blesses Abraham's descendant to become a nation,

¹⁰⁰ Gane, *Old Testament Law*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Gordon J Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 22.

Israel. He similarly appeared to both Isaac and Jacob, reaffirming the blessing to make them into a great people (Gen 12:3, 26:4, 28:14). Second, God blessed the Israelites with Canaan, the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, where they would dwell and serve Him (Num 14:8). Third, God initiated a covenant relationship with the people of Israel. Through Moses, He taught them how to be a holy people: practicing His character in community, which would make them just and righteous, like the Lord Himself. And fourth, God promised to bless the nations through Abraham's descendants. It is repeated throughout Genesis and the rest of the Bible that God is meant to be known and worshipped not just among the Israelite people, but among all the peoples of the earth: strangers and aliens included.

Wenham goes on to explain that Old Testament ethics are not merely about the Israelites obeying the law. The law should be observed as merely the baseline of obedience. What drives obedience is more important: it is the call to be like God, demonstrating His character before others.¹⁰² In Genesis 1:27, God made the first humans in His image, so that all humans have His likeness and character in them. But people are also born with a sin nature: prone to disobey God and His teachings. After the first couple chose to separate from God in the Garden of Eden, humans increased in population and in evil deeds: people needed the law. They needed to learn what pleased God and how to honor Him rightfully. So God gave the people of Israel the law through His chosen servant Moses. After redeeming the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, He gave them the law to shape them into His chosen people, with His character and governed by His righteous ways.

The law was first written as the Ten Commandments which are mostly universal in their teachings. What sets the decalogue apart from other religious teachings is the first command: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of

¹⁰² Wenham, *Story*, 79.

the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:2-3). Honoring God is the first commandment. Because of God’s gracious act of redeeming the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they were now God’s people. In the present context, if our relationships with God are right, understanding our need for redemption from sin and God’s unique ability and desire to redeem us through the blood of Christ, then following God’s commands is the result of simple obedience to our Redeemer and the remaining nine commandments are easy to follow.

Parents teach morals to their children by their actions and their words. The goal of having rules of conduct or laws, is so that one develops character. Character is demonstrated by one’s actions and words. Godly morals are important to teach, so that one understands why they are expected to behave in a certain way. Without a genuine relationship with God, the Old Testament laws seem excessive and burdensome. Old Testament ethics are about honoring God through one’s thoughts, words and deeds. As a nation, the people were all to follow these laws of God and to be holy as a people. Moses exhorts God’s people to be holy, because God Himself is holy (Lev 11:44). The laws given after the Ten Commandments are specifics for how God’s people are to treat one another. Behaving graciously and justly toward aliens, strangers and sojourners should be as natural as behaving toward one’s own family members. In Leviticus 19:34, God commands the Israelites to love foreigners as themselves, because the Israelites were once foreigners, and because He is the Lord.

The point of God creating the nation of Israel, was to honor them by making them a nation of priests, mediating between God and the nations.¹⁰³ We know from Genesis 12:3 that God intends to bless all families through Abraham’s family. God re-states Abraham’s covenantal blessing to Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 19:5-6, ““You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and

¹⁰³ Wenham, *Story*, 103.

brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”” Priests are mediators between God and humanity. As a kingdom of priests, the Israelites were intended to show other nations God’s ways. Even as the Levites were the priestly tribe on behalf of the nation of Israel, this nation was to be holy and teach the ways of God to other nations.

3.3 New Testament Migrants Become Disciples

Before Jesus was born, wise men from the east left their nation to seek out a king which the stars proclaimed was coming. When they found Jesus, they worshipped him (Matt 2:2, 11). When Jesus was presented at the Temple, Simeon prophesied that he would be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Lk 2:32). Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, was warned in a dream to take the infant Jesus and his mother to Egypt, because Herod wanted to kill the newborn king (Matt 2:13-15), making the family of our Savior refugees. When studying the Gospels, we read that Jesus intentionally blessed not only the people of Israel, but also those who lived among the Jewish people but were of other ethnic backgrounds. When these non-Israelites met Jesus, they wanted to follow Him. Some became evangelists, telling their friends and family about the authority and acceptance from their encounters with the Son of God.

Jesus healed the centurion’s servant from Capernaum, lauding his faith as greater than that of the Israelites (Matt 8:10-13, Lk 7:2-10). Jesus makes a bold statement explaining that his family was not inclusive of only his blood relatives, but also included “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt 12:50). Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman, commending her faith as great (15:28). Jesus declared, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations” (24:14, Mk 13:10), highlighting

the significance of gospel proclamation to all people groups around the world. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus elevates the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, by stating that people who help these, honor Jesus. The Father will bless them, and they will inherit the kingdom (Matt 25:34-40). But those who ignore marginalized groups such as the hungry, the destitute or strangers are dishonoring Jesus and will be punished (25:45-46).

When a Syrophoenician woman visited Jesus in the Tyre and Sidon region, they bantered about whether non-Jews were worthy of His healing. Jesus commended her when she told him the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs, implying that the Gentiles were eager for the truth which could only be found in Jesus. As a result, her demon-possessed daughter was healed (Mk 7:24-30). When Jesus cleansed the temple from money changers, Luke writes, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (11:17). Jesus was referring to Isaiah who prophesied that foreigners would devote themselves to the Lord, honor His name, serve Him. These will worship and enjoy God. Their sacrifices and offering will please Him, and His house will be known as a gathering place for all peoples to pray (Isa 56:6-7). The Jews had created a marketplace in the court of the Gentiles, the only area in the Temple that non-Jews could enter. Jesus physically cleared the obstacles to God at the temple which the Jews constructed in order to maintain their places of authority and privilege. Jesus would go beyond this, breaking all barriers - both physical and spiritual – so that the nations could worship God. As it is written in Ephesians:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinance, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and

members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:14-22).

In reading Luke's Gospel, more Gentiles demonstrate that they want to worship Yahweh, the Sovereign Lord. John baptized tax collectors and soldiers (3:12-14), people who were not generally found in the Temple and synagogues. Jesus teaches about Elijah being sent to the widow in Zarephath, instead of the widows in Israel (4:25-26). He also tells when Elisha healed Naaman, the leper from Syria rather than the lepers in Israel (4:27). Jesus teaches a parable about the good Samaritan who showed mercy and love to a man who had been beaten by robbers on the road to Jericho (10:30-37). He teaches about the sign of Jonah, when the Queen of the South will condemn sinners (11:31). He prophesies, "And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God" (13:29). When Jesus heals ten lepers, and the only one who thanks him was a Samaritan, whom Jesus extols for his faith (17:16-19). Jesus calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham when he repents, affirming that Zacchaeus is forgiven and saved (19:9-10). Luke closes with Jesus' proclamation that the gospel should be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem (24:47).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the Jacob's well near Sychar. He explains to her that the location of worship does not matter, but that God the Father seeks worshippers who honor Him in spirit and truth (4:5-30). She told the people of Sychar that she met the promised Messiah Jesus, and many went to meet Jesus and came to believe in Him (Jn 4:39-42). An official from Capernaum, when he heard that Jesus could heal sicknesses, traveled to Galilee to ask Him to heal his son. Jesus told him that his son would live, and he did, so that the official and his entire household believed. In all of these examples, Jesus blesses and affirms the faith of individuals who were not from the tribes of Israel. Jesus' demonstration of grace and acceptance through faith emphasizes that the blessing of Abraham from Genesis 12 includes all other tribes and

nations, including migrants today who live among the people of God and those scattered throughout the whole earth.

The book of Acts continues with the gospel spreading beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Enoch Wan, a theologian and missiologist, describes Priscilla and Aquila as a “diaspora couple” engaged in fruitful ministry among the early church ¹⁰⁴. Their vocations were as tentmakers, and they were already mobile, allowing them to share their faith and teach about Jesus wherever they travelled. They taught in major cities including Pontus, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. Priscilla and Aquila were skilled cross-cultural ministers. They had the gifts of teaching, hospitality and mentoring. Their self-sufficient work gave them a platform to interact with other merchants as well as local people from many different contexts. Priscilla and Aquila were courageous and yet faithful in the New Testament environment which was sometimes dangerous.

Barnabas and Paul were sent from the Antioch Church to share the gospel with others. Paul went to the Jews first, but he then went to the Gentiles with the ambition to preach where Christ was yet unknown (Rom 15:20). Scott Moreau explains that Barnabas and Paul were able to take advantage of the *Pax Romana*, by using trade languages, roads and infrastructure in order to teach in major cities.¹⁰⁵ House churches were formed in strategic municipalities and became centers for missionary outreach.¹⁰⁶

3.4 Diaspora Missiology

Enoch Wan writes that the church needs a stronger theology of multiculturalism from the Old Testament. A truly biblical theology would compel the Western Church to humbly serve within the worldwide church without insisting on dominance and paternal

¹⁰⁴ Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missions: Theory, Methodology and Practice* (Portland: Western Seminary, 2011), 170.

¹⁰⁵ A. Scott Moreau and Beth Snodderly, eds., *Reflecting God's Glory Together: Diversity in Evangelical Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishers, 2011), 340.

¹⁰⁶ Wan, *Diaspora Missions*, 173.

attitudes. A widespread theology of multiculturalism would promote regional theologies and seek to promote the faith in many different contexts. Writing from his viewpoint in North America, Wan sees that there is still a need in the 21st century for the church to understand the biblical promises for all nations and for the Western Church, in particular, to be more accepting of leaders and theologies from the non-white traditions. Without a stronger theology of ethnic diversity, based on the unity of the Bible's teachings the worldwide church will continue to be dominated by white, Western culture and ideology, which is not representative of the worldwide church and sometimes not biblical.

Wan and Richard J. Konieczny summarize the following points necessary for an Old Testament theology of multiculturalism. Abraham was called as an individual to father a nation which would be a kingdom of priests to bless all nations (Gen 12). Israel's unique calling to God also has a redemptive role for all nations (Ex 19:1-6, 1 Pet 2:9-10). The purpose of the covenants given to Abraham and through Moses was to create a nation that was counter-cultural, based on God's revelations to His people. Through Abraham's biological and faith-based descendants, all nations would be blessed, and the curse of sin and separation from God would be overcome. Cultures are neutral, and elements of diverse cultures should be used to worship God. However, people who use cultural symbols for idolatry or opposition to God will be judged. While the prophets and biblical writers sometimes show contempt toward other nations, it is only when the leaders and people of the other nationalities are deliberately opposing the Lord and His teachings that they are cursed. But when nations repent, the Lord hears. In Isaiah 19:21-22, the Lord promises to reveal Himself to the Egyptians, so that when they worship Him, He will answer their prayers and heal them. There will be representatives from every nation worshipping God in heaven. Redemption is being revealed to all nations: those redeemed in Christ do not need to adopt the identity of the people of Israel in order to be saved. When the nations worship in unity, the Lord is blessed by their diverse and unique

cultural offerings.¹⁰⁷ Exercising a truly multi-cultural theology would be a clear testimony to the nations and would result in churches committing radically to world evangelization.

Wan writes of the biblical imperative and strategy of reaching diaspora peoples. Urbanization and displacement resulting from war, climate change and food scarcity have caused 3% of the global population to migrate from their birth nations to seek refuge elsewhere. An estimate of the diaspora population in the year 2000 was 175 million and surged to 192 million by the year 2005, and this population continues to increase. Diaspora peoples include anyone who has left their region of birth to live elsewhere, including refugees, migrant workers as well as businesspeople and international students. Wan states that nearly one in 35 people is a migrant¹⁰⁸. Often people today are so inundated with news and information that when they see the numbers, they question the availability of resources to help, but Christians must continue to be sensitive, remembering that each person on the move is made in the image of God.

The sheer number of diaspora peoples is overwhelming, but Wan argues that God is sovereign in the migration of peoples. Because they are already mobile and must adapt to survive, they are often more open to changes in lifestyle, faith and spiritual conversion. So far in the 21st century, diaspora peoples have made significant contributions to worldwide missions. Migrating Christians have had a part in renewing Christianity in post-Christian Europe.¹⁰⁹ The churches in Germany, and all over Europe, that have welcomed refugees and migrants are the churches which are growing. Migrants are revitalizing the churches whose populations have been declining over the past decades. While making changes requires creative and cooperative effort, Ann Marie Mazzone, a

¹⁰⁷ Richard J. Konieczny and Enoch Wan, *An Old Testament Theology of Multiculturalism. Diversity: God's Eschatological Plan for the Nations* (Global Missiology, 2004), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory Methodology and Practice* (Portland: Western Seminary, 2011), 61.

¹⁰⁹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 31.

missionary to Bielefeld, Germany has seen explosive growth as a result of her church reaching into diaspora populations. Before 2005, her church only ministered in the German language, but since including outreach in Arabic, Persian and Russian languages, the pastors regularly baptize dozens of newly-disciplined believers every quarter. When the congregation meets for worship on Sundays, the multi-linguistic worship team leads using all four languages. After the singing, the congregation moves into four language groups where they receive biblical teaching. After the teaching, the church enjoys a Sabbath meal together. Their vision is to minister to the felt needs of all, German or refugee, healthy or drug-addicted, sensitively learning and observing cultural practices while growing together as the body of Christ.¹¹⁰

Wan analyzes the Jewish diaspora and exile to give believers a biblical understanding of God's sovereignty in the contemporary migration of people groups. First, God led the people of Israel to Egypt, Canaan and Babylon and Persia. God was the initiator of the Israelites' exile and dispersion, in order to sanctify and discipline His chosen people (Ezek 39:28, Amos 5:27, Lam 4: 22, Jer 46:28). God desired to purify His people, so that they would be the holy nation He designed for them to be. Second, through the guidance of Moses, and then the prophets, God instilled in the Israelites a hope for a future regathering. Third, the nation of Israel was called to be a light to all nations and share the love and mercy of God to all families, even while in exile. And finally, God was preparing Israel and the nations for the coming of the Messiah and the salvation for all peoples.¹¹¹

Moses continually reminds the Israelites that they were once slaves in Egypt. This was a shared, national experience lasted for more than 400 years in the early stages of Israel's nationhood. It was a time when the people of God did not have their own land but

¹¹⁰ Anne Marie Mazzone, "Personal Prayer Letter," 3/14/2018.

¹¹¹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 60-61.

lived in a land governed by *pharaohs* who worshipped different idols. Even though it was a difficult time, the Lord was creating a people who would know the value of purity and long for salvation. In remembering their experience in Egypt, they should treat the minorities among them with grace and dignity. In Jeremiah 29:5-7, the Lord speaks to the Judeans in exile through the prophet to seek the welfare of Babylon, where He sent them: build homes, plant gardens, marry and live in the land. They were to help build Babylon, not forgetting their past in Israel, but living by the law of the Lord and being a blessing those around them. God wanted to use the Israelites to teach His ways to the Babylonians. While exile is an unusual commission, the Lord wanted to use Israel to bless the Babylonians and Assyrians. Similarly, Wan argues that there is a purpose for God's moving people today¹¹². In many Middle Eastern countries, it is illegal for a local to convert from Islam to another religion. Many persecuted Christians, and those who have suffered discrimination because of their beliefs, have left their birth countries to live in other countries where they can worship freely.

Using missiological definitions may be helpful to make this point. Regular missions is cross-cultural evangelism, discipleship and church-planting among people groups where there is an established church. Frontier missions has the same goals, except the people groups do not yet have viable, indigenous churches and require cross-cultural workers to serve among them.¹¹³ Missions to migrants and displaced peoples may be regular or frontier missions. But frontier missions is essential in order for all ethnic groups to be reached. Discipling Muslims in the diaspora is highly strategic, because discipleship is illegal in many Muslim nations. God may well be orchestrating the movement of peoples out of Muslim nations in order for them to become disciples and disciple-makers in another country.

¹¹² Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 108.

¹¹³ Steven C. Hawthorne, ed., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement Study Guide* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 95.

Wan encourages new paradigms for missions, taking into account not only migration, but the shift of evangelical Christianity to the majority world. The outreach should be contextualized and holistic. Diaspora missions is accomplished by diaspora workers who cannot focus solely on spiritual needs like salvation and discipleship, but they must also advocate and provide for physical needs. Missions has become borderless: one might go to another country to serve, but often within cities there are many ethnic groups who are waiting to be reached. The 21st Christian must think about missions not as a territorial goal, but a goal to reach out to and bless all peoples, everywhere. Churches need to give generously for local and overseas cross-cultural evangelism. Diaspora missions is transnational and global: someone fluent in Arabic may live in a city in the US reaching out to Muslims from several different countries. They may travel in and out of refugee camps in Africa or Europe ministering to Arabs in their diaspora.¹¹⁴ The Mission to Seafarers is a unique paradigm for serving international workers aboard merchant ships around the world. Worship meetings take place when ships come to port, but regular discipleship happens continually as the ships travel from harbor to harbor around the world.¹¹⁵ Diaspora missiology requires not only biblical studies and theology, but also knowledge of sociology, psychology, technology and the arts. Working with diaspora peoples is not merely sending and receiving missionaries from and to one dominant culture, but it is being obedient to follow where God is sending, and to engage with multiple people groups based on their circumstances¹¹⁶ Diaspora missions requires commitment, flexibility and creativity.

Diaspora Missions is strategic in fulfilling the great commission. Diaspora Christians are the most effective at reaching their relatives and friends with the gospel, especially after re-settlement in new areas away from home. Having the same culture and

¹¹⁴ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 138.

¹¹⁵ Missions to Seafarers. <http://ministryto.seafarers.org>. Accessed 4/28/2023.

¹¹⁶ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 141.

language skills makes migrant disciples the best ministers to reach their kin. So new believers need to be disciplined to maturity in Christ and supported to engage in lifestyle evangelism.¹¹⁷ Diaspora missions is critical, and yet Enoch Wan writes that Westerners have obvious challenges in this highly relational ministry.¹¹⁸ Westerners in general tend to live in urban centers and are often affected by broken or dysfunctional relationships and marriages. Especially during the covid-19 pandemic, the predominant relationships among Westerners have been virtual (on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Zoom as opposed to direct, in-person interaction with which migrants are more accustomed. Western church activities tend to be program-oriented rather than creating time and space for people to gather as families and simply do life together. Migrants want high-touch relationships, rather than emphasizing hi-tech activities and social media platforms. Christianity is a faith based on personal relationships with the Creator God and Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Mediator. Refugees and asylum seekers desperately desire relationships in addition to having their physical needs met. Most are from high-relational cultures where extended families live together.

Diaspora ministers must promote a kingdom mindset in their discipleship, emphasizing the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Ministers should commit to working in teams practicing strategic stewardship and relational accountability: using all God-given gifts and resources to build the Kingdom with transparency and accountability, as opposed to only sharing resources through paternalistic and dominant relationships.¹¹⁹ Wan concludes his book on diaspora missiology on a positive note. His opinion is that most Christians are simply not yet aware that God is sovereign in directing migration. With a God-centered, redemptive

¹¹⁷ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 188.

¹¹⁸ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 192.

¹¹⁹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 362.

theology of the sovereign Lord overseeing all human movement, Wan believes that more Christians will become active in reaching peoples of the diaspora, at home and abroad.¹²⁰

In the introduction to *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*, Philip Jenkins summarizes Jehu Hanciles' thesis: "It argues that migration has been an indispensable element in the advancement of the Christian faith from the earliest beginnings and a prime factor in the plural frontiers of cross-cultural engagement that mark the world Christian movement. Migration is a constant feature of human existence and a key driving force of historical change; so it is no surprise that migrants have literally been prime movers of Christian expansion. As this treatment makes clear, every Christian migrant is a potential missionary!"¹²¹ Henciles explains that if it were not for migrants throughout history who left their own tribes and nations, then Christianity would not be the global faith that it is today.¹²² When studying the patriarch, one can easily see that their movements were largely directed by God. Henciles writes that the movements of migrants and refugees today can be credited to the sovereignty of God.¹²³ He writes that through migration, those on the move understand are experiencing God's redemption and work.¹²⁴

Henciles points out that Moses was a Hebrew raised by an Egyptian princess. As an adult, he took revenge on an Egyptian taskmaster for his merciless treatment of a Hebrew slave. When this act became known, Moses escaped to Midian, where he married Zipporah and thought he might settle down. Moses named his first son *gēr-shom* meaning, "I have become a foreigner [*ger*] in a foreign land."¹²⁵ Moses had many formative experiences of being on the outside and not belonging, which made him an ideal

¹²⁰ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 368.

¹²¹ Jehu Henciles, *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), Location 203.

¹²² Henciles, *Migration*, Location 210.

¹²³ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2079.

¹²⁴ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2084.

¹²⁵ Henciles, *Migration*, Location 2260.

candidate to lead the great exodus of the Hebrew people out of the land of their slavery.¹²⁶

3.5 Theology of Discipleship Among Urban Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In the first book of the Bible, God promises to bless all families around the world through Abraham's family. "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). The promise to bless all families includes refugees and asylees, both individuals and families, who leave their nations of origin in order to live in other regions. The promise is fulfilled in John's vision in the last book of the Bible as representatives from all people groups worship God together, declaring salvation from Jesus, the Son of God: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9-10).

In His last commandment, Jesus commissions His followers to make disciples of all nations. "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18-20). In 1974, 2,700 Christian leaders from 150 different countries gathered in Lausanne, Switzerland to worship the Lord of the Great Commission.¹²⁷ John Stott

¹²⁶ Henciles, *Migration*. Location 2261.

¹²⁷ John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-3>. Accessed 1/23/2023.

wrote the Lausanne Covenant expressing the fundamentals of the evangelical faith as well as the commitment to accomplish the Great Commission. Consequently, in 1989, church and missions leaders started a network known as AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, with the goal to mobilize resources for evangelical witness among every people group.¹²⁸ Christians are continually categorizing people groups, translating scriptures and improving evangelistic and church-planting techniques. Cross-cultural ministers use psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics to understand people groups better and serve them more effectively, with the motivation that some from every tribe and people will worship Christ throughout eternity. Christians have studied and further developed ideas of discipleship. Refugees and asylum seekers include both reached and unreached people groups, who are still learning to obey all that Jesus commanded. In the remainder of this chapter, I will reflect on biblical models of discipleship and how they can be applied to refugee and asylum-seeking communities of faith.

3. 6 Biblical Discipleship

God chose Abraham and his descendants, making them into a great nation and promising that they would represent Him before other nations who worshipped idols. The Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew the God of Creation as their Lord. They understood His character and mission through personal revelation (Gen 12:1-3, 26:2-5, 35:9-12). God later gave Moses commandments and scriptures to further mold the people of God in the ways of God. Through miraculous acts, the Law and its promises, God made Himself known and worshipped, however, not all families of the earth were being blessed. The Son of God, incarnate as Jesus, was sent to Abraham's family to make

¹²⁸ Jeff Ritchie, The Outreach Foundation. <https://www.theoutreachfoundation.org/what-we-do>. Accessed 1/23/2023.

God, the heavenly Father of all families, known. Jesus taught all who wanted to learn – both Jews and Gentiles - what it means to worship the Lord of all creation and to welcome the ways of the Kingdom of God on earth. He taught that God seeks followers who worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). His followers could have harmonious relationships with God, the Father in heaven, through Jesus' saving work which was better and more effective than human traditions or rituals.

The apostle John records a prayer of Jesus, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (17:3). Jesus, the Son of God, wanted his followers to know the Father. Knowing God is the requirement for eternal life. Throughout His life and ultimately by His death, Jesus taught His Father's ways, Kingdom ways. Jesus showed how to live by grace for the eternal glory of God rather than in judgment pursuing the temporal traditions of humanity. He upheld the Jewish teachings, stating that he came to fulfill their principles and promises, not destroy them (Matt 5:17). Jesus did not come for only the Jews, by his prayer, he demonstrated that he wanted his disciples to make God known to others. "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word" (Jn 17:18, 20). Jesus expected his followers to teach others, those in the Temple and synagogues and those outside.

What Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 16:24 is applicable for disciples today, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." This requires Christians to sacrificially leave behind the ways of the world and deny their personal ambitions. Disciples learn the difference between the desires of their human flesh and the spirit by reading the Bible along with other Christians. Other believers can encourage us by sharing their experiences and explaining the scripture for us to know how to apply it in our daily lives. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, cell group leaders can interpret the scriptures for us systematically, so that we know God and

understand His ways in fellowship. We gather with other disciples to learn with them and from them.

Following Jesus' example, the apostle Paul made it his ambition to know Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, Paul writes, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." For Paul, to know God meant to worship Him and to teach others the revelation of God. Disciples of Christ will be followers – always looking to Christ and His teachings from scripture. They will also be leaders in their communities, witnessing to others, teaching the same scriptures until the world is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (Hab 2:14).

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? As described in Acts 2:42, the disciples "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Disciples engage in these four activities: applying the scriptures, gathering with other believers (in church or cell groups), celebrating communion to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus and praying. According to the missions organization Trans World Radio Canada, elements of effective discipleship include prayer (1 Thess 1:2-3), the Word of God (Rom 10:17), Love (1 Thess 2:5-8), Fellowship (Heb 10:24-25), Evangelism and Service (1 Thess 1:4-10) (which is described in other documents as training to make disciples), and Trusting God (Rom 8:28).¹²⁹

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (USA) promotes a discipleship cycle of "hearing the word, responding actively, and then debriefing."¹³⁰ In describing the discipleship cycle, Jon Ball uses the phrase hearing the word in the sense that one understands and chooses to obey the teaching of scripture. I conjecture that the phrase is used also to be inclusive of non-literate learners, because even though IVCF is an organization for college students in the USA, these students minister among urban and

¹²⁹ "Discipleship Essentials." <https://www.twr.ca/projects/discipleshipessentials>. Trans. World Radio Canada. Accessed 1/26/2023.

¹³⁰ Jon Ball, *The Discipleship Cycle* (IVCF), 2. Accessed 4/28/2023.

global people groups. Ball explains that it is not enough to merely read the scriptures and understand them intellectually, but hearers must respond to the biblical teaching by allowing it to transform their thoughts, decisions and actions. Another staff worker David de Leon noticed that the most dynamic college disciples were students who had been on mission trips. After their short-term ministry, these students lived out their discipleship in active, communal ways, building small groups and campus fellowships that naturally witnessed and grew.¹³¹ So, back on campus, at the end of every Bible study, disciples look for ways to apply the scriptures that they just studied, and they each share how they can integrate the teaching in their lives in the next week. They return to their dorms or homes, go to work or attend classes, but when they re-convene, they share about how they applied the teaching in their lives. This debriefing is a unique and important element in the discipleship cycle. Debriefing must be in an atmosphere of vulnerability where genuine sharing and accountability occurs. Students share how they used the biblical teaching from the previous week in their lives, and they discuss the results – how their circumstances, thinking, responses, actions and relationships changed as a result of intentionally applying the scriptures in their lives. As the cycle continues, the students learn more about the Bible, develop a biblical worldview and build lives which reflect their faith. Relationships within the small group and fellowship also deepen, because students begin to trust one another as they share personal challenges and successes. When believers are vulnerable enough to share how things went wrong, then others can learn from their experiences. Others can choose to respond using the fruit of the Spirit or with their gifts of the Holy Spirit in a safe environment, which is how the body of Christ is supposed to operate. People who are in biblically accountable relationships learn to pray more intentionally. They begin to train themselves to see where God is actively working

¹³¹ Ball, *The Discipleship Cycle*, 2.

in the lives of the people around them. As the cycle continues, disciples increase their faith.

Dallas Willard defines a disciple as “one who, intent upon becoming Christlike and so dwelling in His ‘faith and practice,’ systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end. By these decisions and actions, even today, one enrolls in Christ’s training and becomes His pupil or disciple.”¹³² Disciples make systematic and progressive choices, decisions and actions when they understand scriptural principles. When they learn the ways of God, they desire to please God, through worship and obedience. One example is prioritizing church or cell group attendance over work and recreation. Another example is budgeting in order to tithe regularly, cutting back on unnecessary leisure and luxury expenses and giving those funds for the work of the Church. Yet another example would be choosing to spend vacation time on a short-term mission trip to witness how God is at work in another culture. In describing different modes of spiritual practice, Mark Maddix writes,

Spiritual practices can be categorized as inward, outward, and corporate domains. *The inward domain* focuses on the transformation and development of the inner aspects of the human person. They include prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, silence, fasting, and journaling. *The outward domain* focuses on the social and behavioral aspects of the spiritual formation. Spiritual practices include blessed subtraction (take away specific things in your life), solitude, and acts of mercy, physical exercise, rest/sabbatical, and tithing. *The corporate domain* helps persons participate in practices of accountability through community and worship. Spiritual practices include public confession of sins, participation in public worship, celebration, and accountability by a spiritual director or small group leader. When all three of these domains are being practiced, the person is being formed and shaped holistically.¹³³

The inward practices need to be taught and regularly practiced in order to become a natural part of one’s life. As the ultimate mentor, Jesus taught in the synagogues (Matt

¹³² Dallas Willard, *The Cost of Nondiscipleship*. <https://srom.org/what-is-a-disciple/#:~:text=The%20disciple%20is%20one%20who,becomes%20his%20pupil%20or%20disciple.%E2%80%9D>. Accessed 4/20/2024.

¹³³ Mark Maddix, *Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation*, Chapter 8. Estep, James R., and Kim, Jonathan H., eds., 2010. *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*. Prague: B & H Publishing Group. Accessed January 19, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Pdf.

4:23, Mk 1:39) and meditated on the law and the prophets with his disciples. He taught his followers to pray (Matt 6:9-15). Jesus explained fasting which honored and displeased God (6:16-18). Mentors are helpful to Christian converts especially in modeling prayer or personal Bible reading and in regularly following up with those newer to the faith. Mentors share their lives with younger Christians, modeling personal and corporate worship practices, time management for work, worship and rest and money management. Mentors help young believers to feel more secure in their faith and introduce them to the church ways, so that they can engage meaningfully in the corporate domain of spiritual practices. Discipleship is fruitful not only when one has a mentor to nurture and guide in spiritual ways, but possibly even more so when one becomes a mentor or disciple-maker to other believers.

According to Monsignor Charles Pope, pastor of the Holy Comforter – Saint Cyprian Catholic Church in Washington, DC, the Five Disciplines of Discipleship for Catholics include purposefulness, perseverance, poverty, promptness, and permanence. Concerning purposefulness, Pope explains Jesus' resolution to go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of Jewish and government leaders, die and then be resurrected. Pope asks his readers, "What about us? Are we as determined to seek Christ and head for His Kingdom? Is our direction clear? Have we set our sights resolutely, or do we meander about? Are we on the highway to Heaven, or do we make compromises with this passing world, seeking to serve two masters (6:24)? Notice how easily we take exits for sin city, vicious village, and injustice junction."¹³⁴

Concerning perseverance, Christians are exhorted to face challenges directly and endure hardships. The apostle Paul writes to the Romans, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him

¹³⁴ Monsignor Charles Pope, *Five Disciplines of Discipleship*. <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2019/07/01/five-disciplines-of-discipleship/>, accessed 2/1/2023.

we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:1-5). To Timothy, Paul goes on to explain that those who follow Jesus Christ will experience persecution (2 Tim 3:12), so Christians learn to exercise godliness and persevere in all circumstances.

Regarding poverty, Jesus said that it is more difficult for a wealthy person to enter God's kingdom than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (Mk 10:25). Matthew records more of Jesus' teaching regarding material possessions. He tells his followers that their security is in spiritual treasures in heaven rather than temporary, material possessions on earth (6:19-21). Pope describes poverty as "freedom from the snares of power, popularity, and possessions."¹³⁵ Christians honor the Sabbath by setting aside one day every week to refresh their spirits and not seek financial gain, which is a counter-cultural practice. Christians are taught to give generous tithes and offerings to the church and social concern ministries which give relief to the poor and disadvantaged. Disciples learn to deny temporary fulfillment created by earthly treasures, which may mean not getting promoted to leadership positions and living within one's means. Furthermore, disciples are encouraged, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" (Heb 13:5).

Another way to think of promptness is readiness. In Matthew 24, Jesus describes the things that will take place during the end times. He tells his disciples to always be ready, because He will return when people least expect it (Matt 24:44). Paul writes to the Ephesians to put on shoes, ready to go and share the gospel of peace, as part of their

¹³⁵ Monsignor Charles Pope, *Five Disciplines of Discipleship*. <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2019/07/01/five-disciplines-of-discipleship/>, accessed 2/1/2023.

spiritual armor (6:15). Peter teaches Christians that they must always be prepared to share their faith and hope (1 Pet 3:15), in the context of potential persecution. As we understand and receive God's agape love, Christians must increasingly demonstrate love to others, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body (Heb 13:1-3).

The final discipline of discipleship is permanence, being faithful and confident in our beliefs. In 2 Peter 1:10, Christians are encouraged, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities [knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love], you will never fall." Paul wants the Colossians to be at peace, to be united in love, and "to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2-3). Knowing Christ is different from knowing about Christ: we are invited into a personal relationship with the living God. If my faith is in Christ, and not my own abilities and skills, then I will align my life's purpose to the purpose of God. Doubts, fears and pressures of the world will not affect me, because I am secure. I have permanence regarding my future, and I have peace and hope in Christ.

3.7 Description and Analysis of Cross-cultural Discipleship Frameworks

There are many resources available in English which explain discipleship in the western context. Discipleship in majority-world contexts look different. Corporate spiritual practices may be challenging for believers, depending on whether Christians can worship openly and what resources are available in their context. In closed countries,

where it is illegal to convert from the national religion or where churches do not exist, Bible teaching and Christian fellowship are severely limited. The reason that the Lausanne covenant and vision of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement were necessary is because people from unreached or unengaged people groups had incredible obstacles to learn about the Christian faith and grow as disciples. The rallying cry of missiologists since the first Lausanne gathering has been to prioritize evangelism and church planting among the least reached ethnic groups. Otherwise, there will not be worshippers from every nation, tribe, people and language worshipping Jesus in eternity (Rev 7:9). The most popular human strategy of evangelizing the nations has been to send western workers into the different parts of the world where churches are scarce or do not exist and where people do not have the Bible in their own language. Could it be that there are other effective means to see discipleship take root in every culture?

In 1951, the United Nations Human Rights Commission was established to find solutions for refugees, stateless peoples and the internally displaced as a result of World War Two.¹³⁶ Whether from war, natural disasters or the desire to seek better economic opportunities, meeting people on the move and teaching them Kingdom ways is one effective strategy to help accomplish the Great Commission. By leaving their communities, their extended families and homes, refugees like the patriarch Joseph deny or have been denied any ambition to thrive in their own culture. Whatever their reasons for migrating, refugees are in good postures to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Christ. Unlike nominal Christians, disciples are motivated to grow their faith, making God's purposes their priority. Stott describes God's purpose in the Lausanne Covenant, "He has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his

¹³⁶ United Nations High Council on Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9Csomeone%20who%20is%20unable%20or,group%2C%20or%20political%20opinion.%E2%80%9D>. Accessed 19 January 2021.

kingdom, the building up of Christ's body and the glory of his name."¹³⁷ Jesus desires that his followers identify as God's people and worship Him by strengthening the church and witnessing to those outside of the church, which in the present age must include refugees, stateless peoples and the internally displaced.

Stott further writes, "Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world."¹³⁸ One reason that refugee families choose to flee their homelands is religious persecution. Refugees may be in physical danger if they identify openly with a believing community. Some leave their native lands, because they were discriminated against or persecuted for exercising their faith in Christ rather than the national religion. Disciples desire to worship God freely, learn the teachings of the Bible and meet for fellowship and worship with other Christians. Asylum-seeking Christians are in precarious and often times dangerous circumstances, since they may be breaking national laws to enter countries without proper visas or permission to remain, but they are humans who were created in the image of God and were given the cultural mandate to, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:27-28). Refugee and asylee Christians still need to learn to obey all that Jesus commanded as well as seek ways to serve the people around them. And so, discipleship ministry to refugee and asylum seekers is biblically mandated and necessary to help the whole body of Christ to mature in the 21st century.

In their book *Family Discipleship*, Matt Chandler and Adam Griffen explain that part of life-long discipleship is learning the character of God while forming godly

¹³⁷ John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* <http://www.lausanne.org>, Accessed 2/3/23.

¹³⁸ Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant*.

character.¹³⁹ Disciples learn to know God and His Word. They learn what God has done throughout history and can identify where God is working today: in their personal lives and in the lives of others. In growing in Christlikeness, they understand who they are and who God called them to be. They learn to choose what pleases God and how to be more godly. These lessons might be taught in community or family discipleship. One-on-one mentors from outside of the family might not be available to refugees, so often heads of families take responsibility for the spiritual nurture of those in their households. Before or after family meals, Christian families may read scripture together and discuss its meaning and application. They may pray together, asking for God's guidance and provision in their circumstances. When possible, they attend church together, in a language they learned or if they are lucky, using a language which they understand. In the case of most migrants, denominational affiliation is not important. Protestants may attend Catholic mass if that is all that is available, and Catholics may attend Protestant services.

One constructive way of considering cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship is the bounded-set and centered-set theories. In bounded-set thinking regarding salvation, there is a definite line to cross where one can be described as non-Christian or Christian. If a man has confessed his sins, acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is able to take away his sin, received forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, then the man is saved and called Christian. He has crossed the line and is within the boundaries of faith. Salvation is by faith, depending on a once-and-for-all time confession. But suppose a young woman confesses Christ as her Lord but is addicted to alcohol and cannot overcome the habit of drinking in order to live a new, redeemed life in Christ. She cannot stay sober enough to wake up for church or attend cell group meetings on the weekends. She may feel

¹³⁹ Matt Chandler and Adam Griffen, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2020), Location 1667.

oppressed by her shame and depressed about her inability to change. She may still be considered saved, but she needs stronger support with her discipleship.

Consider instead the centered-set theory. Rather than salvation being a one-time decision where people mimic the words of an evangelist who has shared a gospel presentation and cross an imaginary decision line of faith, instead think of faith being a circle with Christ in the middle. People are constantly walking spiritually within their circle of faith, making good and bad decisions about how they live. Each day, with each decision, they must learn to choose decisions which lead them toward Christ rather than away from him. Mentors can help believers to progressively make more of their life decisions in the direction of Christ and biblical teaching.¹⁴⁰ For recent converts who are young adults still living at home with non-believing parents and siblings, it may seem impossible to make some decisions independently without disrupting the family's way of life and thinking. Some outward domain practices, such as baptism, observing the Sabbath or tithing, may slower to practice, given the desire to witness to and still be a blessing to the family. But mentors can show new disciples how to make personal decisions based on the inward and corporate domains, like when they are able to worship at church. Mentors can gradually help new Christians to integrate the faith in all dimensions of their lives.

In centered-set thinking, evangelism and discipleship are on-going within the life of each person. Learning God's character and growing in godliness never stop. When discipling migrants cross-culturally, it is important not to be judgmental or to make assumptions about what individuals believe when they call themselves Christian. Many refugees at Christ Church who are from predominantly Muslim countries begin their testimonies by stating that they were born into Christian families and always had faith.

¹⁴⁰ W. Jay Moon and W. Bud Simon, *Effective Intercultural Evangelism: Good News in a Diverse World* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2021), Location 14.

There are some who have had fantastic Sunday school educations, know God personally and are capable teachers of God's Word. There are others who were never able to attend church openly in their home countries, and they are thirsty for pure spiritual milk in order to mature in their faith (1 Pet 2:2). It is important to consider each person as a believer, spurring growth in individuals as well as honoring families of faith together without comparing them to models of discipleship from the western world.

When working among people groups from the majority world, missionaries are often guilty of not accurately understanding local worldviews. Paul G. Hiebert wrote about the excluded middle: the animated space between religion and science which includes magic, fortune-telling, dreams, visions, sickness and healings. Western-educated missionaries often do not have answers for fate and fatalism, and they often fail to answer life's many questions for those from animistic backgrounds. Too often, Christians skirt difficult questions by claiming the will of God, rather than sufficiently appropriating the results of sin in a way that makes sense. Ignoring the questions of why and how life functions (or is dysfunctional) in the universe may lead to split-level Christianity. Split-level faith is when believers may wholeheartedly attend church on Sundays and participate in community Bible studies; however, when sickness, disease or famine strikes, the believers seek help from their witch doctors, who seem to have better solutions to their immediate problems.¹⁴¹ These believers turn to faith for one part of their lives, but another part of their worldview and life experience is still captive to indigenous teachings about the spirits. Without acknowledging the spirit world, indigenous believers cannot grow into spiritual maturity.

Jay Moon stresses the importance of cross-cultural discipleship using biblical stories to analyze local stories and fables where one's own culture can be better understood. Intercultural discipleship is about transforming one's mind and mindset to be

¹⁴¹ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 45.

more Christlike. As individuals learn more scripture principles, they seek to apply these principles in their Christian communities, so that contextualized discipleship happens. As more people apply the Word of God as a group, they reshape their culture to become a redemptive, witnessing community. Moon recommends using indigenous proverbs to teach gospel concepts, especially in oral cultures, where members of the community do not depend on the written word. He gives three reasons: “Proverbs open ears to hear the gospel that may otherwise be closed. Proverbs clear away the fog in theological understanding. Proverbs root the gospel in vernacular soil such that it feels ‘at home.’”¹⁴²

Because local proverbs embody cultural understanding, when they are used to explain Christian principles, they are readily understood and easy to apply. Local proverbs re-explaining foreign, Christian concepts do not sound foreign any longer, but touch the hearts of the people, making it natural to reflect on their meaning. The gospel is an ancient story which resonates in the hearts of all people, because all people are created in the image of God and long for connection with our Creator (Gen 1:26, Rom 1:20).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson wrote a series of pamphlets outlining the work of missionaries and writing a definition for indigenous churches, which are gatherings of believers in their local contexts which were self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting.¹⁴³ When churches are considering engaging in diaspora or refugee discipleship, it is instructive to consider the three-self principles. For indigenous churches to thrive, they had to fit with the local culture rather than look like they were transplanted by foreigners. While missionaries should model godly decision-making, ultimately it is the indigenous leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit, who lead churches to become rooted in a culture and independent. These churches do not exist for themselves, but to evangelize and plant other churches. Churches which depend

¹⁴² Moon and Simon, *Effective Intercultural Evangelism*, 156.

¹⁴³ Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 115.

on outside resources, including personnel and finances, are still considered other, rather than local. Missionaries should be careful not to try and fix every problem by adding money or always sharing their opinions about what the church could do in order to solve different problems, but missionaries should empower indigenous leaders to make decisions on behalf of the church, consider various biblical options and using local resources. Leaders who serve among refugees and asylum seekers should be looking for ways to empower Christian asylees to engage and form the ministries to other asylees and refugees.

Allen Tippetts later expanded the three-self indigenous church concepts to include self-image, self-functioning and self-giving.¹⁴⁴ These ideas are connected to discipleship and maturity in the indigenous ministry, including work among refugees and asylees. Self-giving reflects back to how John Stott described followers of Christ in the Lausanne covenant: those who obey Christ, join faith communities and serve society. Other missiologists have expanded the definition of indigenous churches, including Paul Hiebert who included self-theologizing, and Charles Van Engen who added self-missiologizing. The idea of expressing theology within one's own culture is important for the church to transform the groups' way of thinking and articulating God's will in a way that makes sense within the context. Self-missiologizing is for the local church to understand its role in participating in the God's global purpose and to launch workers cross-culturally, by sending and by receiving.

Moon explains Bauta Mott's addition of self-discipling to the expanding definition of indigenous churches:

The new model of making disciples among, and by, local believers is Christian socialization or "self-discipling." This model seeks to help an indigenous Christian grow into maturity within his or her cultural context in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Christian maturity should evidence itself in lifestyle that bears witness to the

¹⁴⁴ Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 116.

power and the uniqueness of the gospel. The Church should encourage every tribal group . . . to formulate their own indigenous Christian discipling model for local believers.¹⁴⁵

Effective cross-cultural evangelism should lead to cross-cultural discipleship and church planting. Discipleship is organic, according to the needs of the believers and resources available to them. Those who witness to frontier people groups always anticipate that individuals, families and communities will make decisions to follow Christ. Being available to mentor new believers from the center-set mentality integrates evangelism and discipleship, emphasizing a process of learning to honor Christ in every decision.

Ralph Winter described three types of evangelism, based on the cultural distance between the evangelist and recipient, ranging from E-1 (no cultural barriers) to E-3 (significant cultural barriers such as language, socio-economic and cultural barriers). The same model can be used to think of discipleship. E-1 discipleship is most effective for seeing a whole people group evangelized, because the mentor will not present barriers of understanding when making disciples within their own culture.¹⁴⁶ In the case of urban asylum seekers in Bangkok, the best spiritual mentors are fellow asylum seekers, particularly if they are from the same country of origin. For missionaries, it is always important to follow Paul's advice to Timothy to teach leaders who will train others (2 Tim 2:2).

3.8 Theological Conclusions

In his book *Rescue: Refugees and the Political Crisis of Our Time*, David Miliband of the International Rescue Committee points out what leaders of the great religions teach regarding treatment of refugees. According to Dr. Omid Safi, Director of the Islamic Studies Center at Duke University, the Koran reminds Muslims that they were

¹⁴⁵ Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 117.

¹⁴⁶ Hawthorne, ed., *Perspectives*, 78.

once strangers, and so they must treat strangers and refugees with kindness and compassion.¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (UK) said, “The people of the covenant will be strangers at home, so that they are able to make strangers feel at home. Only thus can they defeat the most powerful of all drives to evil: the sense of being threatened by the Other, the one not like me.”¹⁴⁸

Pope Francis has consistently encouraged more support for refugees, on the policy level of governments to parishes and individuals. After visiting the Moria Camp on the Greek Island of Lesbos, he re-settled twelve refugees to Rome, using his influence and example to advocate for refugees. The pope used the phrase “globalization of indifference” to describe how national leaders are ignoring the reality and seeking the benefits of their own nations at the expense of the displaced.¹⁴⁹ Ken Annan explains the Rule of St. Benedict:

After the words, ‘Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ.’ It gives instructions for the mystical exchange that Jesus talked about, which includes this: ‘[In] addressing a guest on arrival or departure. . . [by] a bow of the head or by a complete prostration of the body, Christ is to be adored because he is indeed welcomed in them.’ *The Rule* also reminds us that treating strangers as holy visitors shouldn’t be primarily for guests who we would honor anyway - friends, the wealthy, the powerful, those who could help us. “Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving *poor people and pilgrims*, because in them more particularly Christ is received.”¹⁵⁰

While the Benedictine monks are only a small fraction of a sodality within the Catholic Church, their example is instructive to all who claim the Christian faith. By honoring guests, including the poor, sojourners and refugees, we honor Christ.

Ed Stetzer writes, “God’s people should be the first ones to open their arms to refugees.”¹⁵¹ While evangelicals worldwide are obeying God’s call to help re-settle

¹⁴⁷ Miliband, *Rescue*, 34.

¹⁴⁸ Miliband, *Rescue*, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Miliband, *Rescue*, 54.

¹⁵⁰ Kent Annan, *You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP), 33-34.

¹⁵¹ Miliband, *Rescue*, 33.

migrants, support work among refugees and advocate for legislation to help asylum seekers, there are church leaders who are opposed to helping people who have broken laws to enter or stay in another country illegally, no matter what the circumstances. Everyone deserves a little more compassion. God's grace is not finite. David Miliband has famously stated:

The treatment of refugees is a weather vane of the character, stability, and values of the international system. We can rescue the dignity and hopes of refugees and displaced people, and if we do so we will help them and in the process restore our own values and international purpose. The goal is to mitigate the suffering of those displaced and release their human potential. But the benefit should be a material difference to the stability of the international order and a practical demonstration of the benefits of international cooperation."¹⁵²

Christians cannot wait for governments and NGOs to sort things out for migrants and refugees. When it was initially founded in 1950 to help displaced Europeans after World War II, the UNHCR believed that the refugee crises was temporary and could be solved within three years. The situation has become increasingly complex, now involving 79.5 million individuals.¹⁵³ How Christians treat Jesus' refugee brothers and sisters is a litmus test of character for individuals and the Church.

Annan conceived of two scales to help Christians measure their personal attitudes toward their neighbors. People move down the Dehumanizing Our Neighbor Scale when they consume media which is unkind in its portrayal of foreigners, silently permit others to use slurs, vote in ways that make the vulnerable even more vulnerable and do not seek the image of God in others.¹⁵⁴ They move along the Good Samaritan Scale (Recognizing Our Neighbor) when they make the effort to see others as fellow humans, empathize with migrants' experiences, look for meaningful ways to connect (sharing meals and other resources) and live with a new understanding that others are brothers and sisters in the

¹⁵² Miliband, *Rescue*, 80.

¹⁵³ UNHCR Website. <https://www.unrefugees.org/about-us/> Accessed 2/1/2023.

¹⁵⁴ Annan, *You Welcomed Me*, 29.

human family.¹⁵⁵ God is mysteriously incarnate in the refugee, orphan and widow. When we welcome aliens and strangers, we welcome God.¹⁵⁶ Annan writes further:

The Savior came as a kind of immigrant from heaven, across borders of divinity and time and space, to walk among humanity. Soon after his birth, his family fled as refugees. He grew up and described himself as someone without a place to lay his head. He hung on the cross forsaken by all and then was raised to life. His most influential interpreter traveled to different lands, enduring hardship in and out of prison, in order to tell people that through Jesus they belong to God's chosen people. The end of the story, which we are still living into, is to finally be fully home with God and with people from all corners of the earth.¹⁵⁷

Because Christians are people of faith, we should already be engaged in evangelism and discipleship for the reached and unreached, geographical neighbors and those overseas. Participation in worldwide evangelization begins at home, but those who love the Lord and long to see Christ return must also be engaged in cross-cultural missions. In the 21st century, we are able to access news happening across the globe in real time: how can we not be concerned? Because Yahweh is our Lord, we are compelled to love migrants and refugees by showing them mercy and treating them with dignity.

There is much we can do to help reach migrants for Christ. Through education, prayers, financial giving and participation on exposure trips, Christians can help those who are reaching migrants. Believers can look for opportunities to know and support migrant families in their cities, volunteering to tutor them in the new national language and drive them to church or other events. Christians can also participate in representative democracy by voting, running for public office and holding representatives accountable for legislation supporting those who are vulnerable, from local to global concerns. Pastors and Christian teachers can be intentional in teaching about migration and Old Testament ethics concerning the vulnerable. When churches host mission conferences and social

¹⁵⁵ Annan, *You Welcomed Me*, 31.

¹⁵⁶ Annan, *You Welcomed Me*, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Annan, *You Welcomed Me*, 125.

concern conferences, they can include workers who serve among refugees to inspire giving and going.

In Bangkok, there are Christian agencies with the mission to support refugee families and asylum seekers. Life Raft is one such organization providing discipleship and life mentoring for migrants. The advocates are Christians who befriend the refugee families, helping them with everyday tasks like going to the market or finding a church or school. In order for families to get financial support, they must establish daily and weekly routines for personal growth, including volunteering to help in churches or schools for refugees or taking online classes to improve their language skills and other knowledge.

Christ Church Anglican in Bangkok, like the other international congregations, has dozens of refugee and asylum-seeking families. The kids and adults are integrated into Sunday school classes. Many refugees are volunteers in different aspects of the church community from helping in the children's ministry, assisting with audiovisual tasks and serving meals. They also cook meals and share their culture during festivals and other community activities. Christ Church also has teams of volunteers who visit refugees in the Immigration Detention Center and make members of the congregation aware of prayer and financial concerns. It is especially rewarding to see refugees from the church and the IDC gain their freedom and be sent to third countries for repatriation.

The task worldwide evangelism is great, but God promises a symphony of worship from all nations at the end of time. It is exciting to live in the current era and to observe how creative the Church can be in obedience to the great commission. May God grant His church the humility to worship Him, the grace to love one another and the commitment to justice and mercy to serve the migrants in our midst.

In the next chapter, I will write of the methods and procedures for my inquiry into the spiritual growth of refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church Bangkok.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter, I describe how a quantitative, interpretive phenomenological research approach is an effective lens for exploring discipleship among the urban asylum seekers at Christ Church. I include descriptions of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and benefits of this study to participants.

4.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

An interpretive phenomenological approach allows a researcher to gather rich descriptions of both personal and corporate experiences. This study highlights the lived discipleship experiences of asylum seekers, most of whom believe they are in a temporary place, away from their home countries and waiting for resettlement in third countries, even though the lengths of their current transitions and final destinations are uncertain. In answering questions about how asylum seekers exercise their faith, they shared about their church attendance in their home countries, in Bangkok and in other countries, if they have been re-settled. Using phenomenological research allowed me to probe deeply to learn how their worship experiences are meaningful to them.

In the hermeneutical phenomenological approach to research, information analysis is a spiral: learning from independent parts to inform the whole then reflecting back to the parts. Understanding increases as information is added.¹⁵⁸ Using this

¹⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger was the chief proponent of hermeneutical, phenomenological research. Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Sage, 2020), Location 1053.

hermeneutic framework gave me an understanding of participants' descriptions of discipleship and spiritual growth in order to inform my own understanding of these terms. As a Christian from the United States, I have personal, cultural biases about discipleship and personal spiritual growth. It was instructive to learn what the asylum seekers believe discipleship is without imposing my definitions or comparing their experiences to western models. I acknowledge my pre-understanding of discipleship. Hearing participants share their experiences gave me a renewed projection and different lens of discipleship.¹⁵⁹ Christ Church is an Anglican Church, where the worship and ministry models are best described as Western, even though the church is located in Bangkok, Thailand and the Thai congregation is under the authority of the Singaporean Diocese. In their transition period in Bangkok, I wanted to know how asylum seekers find meaning in their church experiences. As a phenomenological researcher, I illuminated their lived discipleship experiences and their feelings about those experiences,¹⁶⁰ differentiating between the two in my data collection, analysis and writing.

While ethnography is an alternate research approach that would have contributed interesting findings, my study was neither deconstructive, nor meant to critique the church's programs. I included participants from several different nations and people groups within one church body, and the experiences of those from different countries were different. And so, ethnography would not have served my research purpose.

4.2 Participants

Participants for this study included eight units who were Christ Church members at the time of the interview. One unit had been resettled in another country; another unit resettled in another country after I had interviewed them. They are from Pakistan, Iran

¹⁵⁹ Peoples, Location 1081.

¹⁶⁰ Peoples, Location 482.

and Sri Lanka and can be described as individuals (female, male, single and married), a married couple and a family. The youngest was eighteen years old, and the oldest was fifty-two. All but one completed their secondary education. Two went on to complete vocational training. Two finished some university training. Four were employed in professional careers in their home countries. The participants attended Christ Church from as little as four months to eight years. They were in Bangkok from six to nine years.

4.3 Research Questions

My central research question was how do asylum seekers and refugees at Christ Church Bangkok understand their discipleship? The key research questions for this qualitative study were:

1. How did refugees and asylum seekers exercise faith in their home countries?
2. How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise their faith in Bangkok and in their current countries (if they have been resettled to a third country or returned to their home country)?
3. How do refugees and asylum seekers perceive and evaluate their growth as followers of Christ?

4.4 Sampling Strategies and Procedures

I hosted semi-structured interviews with individuals and families. I interviewed Pakistanis, Iranians and Sri Lankans, because these are the countries from which the majority of asylum seekers at Christ Church come. Church leaders asked if I would interview Nigerians, Cambodians and Burmese who were seeking asylum, but Christians from these nations tend to become members of churches in Bangkok where their native languages are spoken. I know there are asylees from Vietnam and Syria in Bangkok; however, I did not know any who were Christian nor did they attend Christ Church. I met

the interviewees in the homes in Bangkok or at nearby coffee shops. One interview took place over WhatsApp, since the participant lives in Australia.

There are Christian asylum seekers in Bangkok who worship at other churches, including the Evangelical Church of Bangkok and the International Church of Bangkok. They are also members of ethnic-specific churches such as The Redeemed Christian Church of God (Nigerians), Pakistani house churches, the U Naw Memorial Myanmar Baptist Church or Cambodian fellowships. I interacted with leaders from these churches to learn generally about the participation of asylum seekers in their church activities. I interviewed asylum seekers at my church to learn how they describe their participation in church activities and how they find meaning and value in discipleship and spiritual activity. I was curious to know how they first found out about Christ Church and what our community offers them which has helped them to grow spiritually.

4.5 Data Collection Sources

The main source of data was transcriptions from interviews with individuals and families. I also took notes in an audio journal describing my experiences after each interview and wrote memos in journal-form as I analyzed the data from the interviews. Some participants showed me documents, such as passports, UNHCR cards, graduation diplomas and family Bibles. One interviewee showed me their baptism certificate.

The church's annual meeting is held every year in April. Prior to the meeting, members are asked to update their information on a membership roster, so that the leadership can determine how many people constitute a quorum in order for decisions presented at the annual meeting to be valid. However, I know that many asylum seekers do not attend the meeting or vote on agenda items. While the church rosters are continually updated, it is necessary to instruct church members, including asylees the importance of accountability and participation in administrative decisions.

4.6 Data Collection Protocols

Participants received the interview questions in written English prior to their interviews, because I am unable to communicate in the participants' native languages, and I wanted them to be able to consider the questions in advance. I asked clarification questions during the interview. For one interview, I met the asylum seeker in the family home. The participant called a friend on the phone, whose eighteen-year-old son acted as our interpreter. The interpreter was not a Christian, and it meant that he explained things in his own way without being biased to his own faith experience. It also helped for me to hear that the asylee could describe the Christian faith and experiences in a way that a non-Christian understood. In the family interview, the adult children translated their mother's input when I asked her questions which she was unable to explain using English.

I recorded the participants' answers using an app on my iPad. I transcribed the interviews for those which are done in English. I enlisted the help of a Pakistani church member to transcribe some of the interviews from the mp3 recording. After the interviews were transcribed, I asked the participants to clarify answers which are incomplete or the ideas which I did not understand. This feedback helped me to better understand what each participant wanted to express.

One interview took place online since the family resettled in Australia. I intended to interview two families that formerly resided in Bangkok and attended Christ Church but have since returned to their native countries. While initially agreeing to the interviews, both families eventually declined, because they had been deported and did not feel comfortable having their experiences recorded.

I took personal notes during the interviews and recorded my initial impressions soon after each interview as an mp3 file.

4.7 Storing and Preserving Data

I recorded the interviews on a voice recording app on my iPad. I uploaded the digital files to my laptop's hard drive and backed them up on a USB drive and an external hard drive. I analyzed and encoded the rich data from my interviews with participants.

Participants were given codes (P1, P2, P3, etc.) in order to remain anonymous. I am the only one who knows the identities of the participants and their interview responses. After the data was analyzed and I no longer needed to host follow-up interviews, I deleted the information identifying individual participants.

4.8 Data Analysis

The first step in my data analysis was to read each of the transcripts and delete irrelevant data. The next step was to transcribe the information into a Microsoft Word document. Then I began encoding the data into meaning units. My third step was finalizing the meaning units into themes. The fourth step was to look for situated narratives or themes that became evident when different participants are asked the same question. Then I searched for general narratives. After that, I organized the general narratives into general descriptions, uniting the themes of discipleship and spiritual growth which interviewees have experienced.¹⁶¹

Journal writing was useful for my data analysis. Because of my inherent western biases which define discipleship and spiritual growth, I had to constantly check that I am not hearing or reading into my participants' responses. Memo writing and audio recordings after each interview helped me to remember my own impressions, so that I did not confuse them with what participants had shared about their lived experiences.

It was my aim to illuminate the central themes in the discipleship experiences of participants and not just report data of church activity. I highlighted examples of

¹⁶¹ Peoples, Location 2060.

participants' faith practices and their impressions of why the practices were helpful. My conclusions include quotes and descriptions from asylum seekers about their lived experiences. I am interested in how participants define discipleship and spiritual growth, giving their migration from community-oriented cultures. Learning how they interpret and live out their relationships with God will help others to know a variety of discipleship forms. I related how participants' experiences fit in with the existing literature: showing that meaningful discipleship and spiritual activity contribute positively to the overall well-being and mental health of migrants. In the grand narrative of God desiring worship from members of every nation, churches in gateway cities who intentionally minister to refugees and asylum seekers have a vital role in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Because the participants are individuals, a married couple and a family, I wrote about each unit using the plural pronoun "they," rather than specifying their gender pronouns or whether they were the couple of the family, in order to further protect their identities.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

At the time of the interviews, some participants were in the process of registering as asylum seekers with the UNHCR, and others have had their applications rejected. Their immigration status is confidential and not pertinent to this study. There are different opinions on whether Pakistani Christians in Thailand are religiously persecuted, religiously oppressed or are merely seeking better economic circumstances than what they had in Pakistan. Those at Christ Church chose to migrate, for whatever reason. This study focuses on asylum seekers' relationships with God, since they chose to leave their countries of birth. I was interested to learn how they have found ways to continue worshipping God and how they have found meaningful spiritual growth while in this transition point, rather than learning their reasons for migrating.

Thailand is considered a safe nation for religious practice, regardless of one's choice of faith. While the majority of Thai people self-identify as Buddhists, the nation does not have a state religion, and freedom of religious expression is guaranteed to all in the constitution.¹⁶² In the past, immigration raids were conducted immediately outside of international church properties around the capitol city, discouraging many from attending church. However, in the 2021 Universal Periodic Review of the UNHCR, Thai officials reported greater support to provide humanitarian assistance for urban refugees.¹⁶³

Because the community of asylum seekers at Christ Church in Bangkok is small, there was the possibility that participants would discuss my research, influencing how other participants might answer questions. Disparities in financial compensation for participants, translators or transcribers could have created problems. I considered giving transportation vouchers instead of money, so that participants would have money to commute to church activities, medical appointments, or other activities. I also considered giving gift cards to Big-C Superstore, so that participants could use the funds to purchase basic needs of their choice, but often the prices at stores which offer gift cards are more expensive than smaller, local markets. In the end, I gave participants, translators and transcribers 500 baht in cash. While they were grateful for cash reimbursement for participating in my research, they were discreet about not sharing details among other church members.

There can be distrust among asylum seekers from different nations, resulting from the inability to communicate in one another's heart languages. Some also think that that they must compete for limited resources from among the church advocates. It is not

¹⁶² *Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand*, English Translation, Office of the Council of State, accessed March 30, 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdf_url=http%3A%2F%2Fweb.krisdika.go.th%2Fdata%2Foutsitedata%2Foutsite21%2Ffile%2FConstitution_of_the_Kingdom_of_Thailand.pdf&clen=555229&chunk=true, 3.

¹⁶³ "UPR Thailand," UNHCR, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2016/en/123790>

productive to compare their experiences, but it is important for the purpose of mutual edification to learn how each individual and family unit understands their discipleship, personal and corporate.

I did not host interviews at Christ Church. I decided that interviews at church might create jealousy if some asylum seekers were seen spending time with me in activities at church that they were not invited to. Half of the interviews were conducted in participants' homes. The rest were held in coffee shops close to their homes. While some participants live in tight quarters, most participants preferred being in their homes and wanted to host me for a visit. Several expressed pride in their humble dwellings, and graciously offered drinks and snacks or invited me to stay for a meal with their families. Two of them said to me, "You are the second person from church to visit me in my own home." While I am from an individualistic culture and prefer to meet outside of my home, my interviewees are mostly from communal cultures where hospitality is important. It was valuable for me to give the participants the opportunities to bless me by hosting our interviews in their homes.

4.10 Validating/Verifying Strategies

In qualitative research, the researcher must create a methodology which can be replicated by another researcher. When my helper transcribed the mp3 recordings in MS Word, I was able to double check the transcription while listening to the recordings again. Sometimes the transcriber did not know the correct names of the people referred to in the interview, or she misspelled or incorrectly typed words and ideas. Translation can be tricky, because the translator's job is to help the researcher understand the participants' discipleship. It might be hard for the translator not to interpret the meaning of the responses while at the same time translating the content. Only one interview was conducted fully with a translator. This translator is not a Christian, and the experience

was a positive one. The translator sometimes did not know English terms to explain what the participant was saying, and so the participant had to explain the vocabulary they used. In order to validate the interview responses, I had the translator back check the translations in the native language to make sure that they had an understanding of what the participant wanted to communicate.

The hermeneutic circle was important for me to understand lived discipleship and spiritual growth among asylum seekers. Having knowledge of asylees' different experiences gave me a unique, collective perspective that they do not have individually. Confirming knowledge by learning of other participants' experiences further amplified individual meaning units. When analyzing the transcripts, I had a few follow-up interviews to fill in missing information or correct miscommunicated ideas. After interviewing asylum seekers, I hosted a meeting after lunch at church to share my research findings with the congregation. In this meeting, I was able to get feedback from a variety of church members about my research, confirming theories which interviewees shared and suggesting alternate perspectives.

Christ Church's leaders of the Life Raft ministry to urban asylum seekers are generous and godly missionaries who have been active at Christ Church for more than thirty years. These leaders were enthusiastic to learn of my research. While I have led or participated in programs with asylum seekers, I needed to personally get to know other members of this community as a friend and researcher. I took more initiative in talking with asylum seekers during the after-service coffee hour in order to become acquainted with more refugees and asylees individually and as families. I re-joined the Lighthouse Sunday school ministry to get to know other active asylees who are teachers and teaching assistants. The time I spent with participants prior to the interviews helped them to feel comfortable talking with me during the interviews and follow-ups.

Journaling throughout the process helped me to verify meaning units and findings while keeping my own biases in proper perspective. I consulted with my thesis advisor and other researchers at Bangkok Bible Seminary, as well as with other ministers and advocates for asylum seekers, to confirm meaning and ask for feedback about insights and misunderstandings.

4.11 Benefits to Participants

There is little written about the faith journey of Christian refugees and asylum seekers. During the interviews, participants reflected on their spiritual growth and discipleship and their faith experiences were heard and documented. It will be informative for other members of the body of Christ to hear these perspectives of personal discipleship, which include not only Biblical knowledge, but also experiential knowledge and interdependence. Christ Church leaders will benefit from the inquiry by learning how this diverse population of community members finds meaning in church activities. The opportunity to reflect on their faith at a time where they are unencumbered by work commitments or not being discriminated against for their faith will help participants to see progress as well as areas where they could improve themselves. They will also learn how other asylum seekers are growing their faith and engaging in the church family. My interviewees will self-define discipleship and spiritual growth in order to help Christ Church leaders learn how spiritual growth is happening in the community. The information will also be instructive for church leaders, Sunday school teachers and case managers in their countries of resettlement.

By sharing and learning from others' experiences, participants will be able to see themselves as valuable members of the body of Christ, contributing to the ministry of the church in the world. Knowing that the positive experiences of their discipleship are appreciated will contribute to their sense of dignity and pride in their spiritual growth

during this time of transition when their material and economic well-being are impeded. Additionally, interviewees described edifying activities which they practiced in their home churches which could be considered at Christ Church, in order to help all members grow in their discipleship.

In the next chapter, I analyze the results of the eight interviews. I separated similar units of meaning into different topics and wrote about how the refugees and asylees think about these topics.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

My research included three main questions. How did refugees and asylum seekers exercise faith in their home countries? How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise their faith in Bangkok and in their current countries, if they have been resettled to a third country? How do refugees and asylum seekers perceive and evaluate their growth as followers of Christ? I asked participants questions about their church activities in their home countries and in their present circumstances. Their answers described in this chapter frequently attest to each person having a dynamic faith and seeking to grow through nurture as well as service.

5.1 Baptism

Baptism is a symbol of one's Christian faith. All participants of the study were baptized in their home countries, except one unit from a nation where a national religion is widely practiced and whose laws are based on religious law. The interviewee requested baptism when they first began attending Christ Church regularly. The vicar rejected their request, recommending that they first complete an Alpha Course in order to get a better understanding of the Christian faith. An assistant vicar later baptized them prior to their participation in Alpha. He believed that by their publicly declaring their faith and being welcomed into the church family, they would receive encouragement at a time when their faith was fresh and their circumstances were so difficult. They have since completed the Alpha Course.

Five of the people were baptized as infants in Catholic churches in their home countries. Following the tradition of the local parish, one of them knew specifically that they had received baptized when only 41 days old, and they received their first communion when they were nine years old.¹⁶⁴ Another of the Catholics mentioned that before first communion and confirmation in their parish, the believer had to complete six weeks of teaching in order to learn the meaning of the sacrament.¹⁶⁵

Two of the study participants from Catholic backgrounds later received believer's baptisms: one in their home country after changing membership to a Pentecostal church. I asked this participant to share how the pastor prepared baptism candidates. "He taught us about the baptism John gave to Jesus. He taught us how important baptism is in order to have a new life. This was not about sin. It is baptism for a new life in Christ. You commit yourself to be like Jesus and draw near to Jesus. To become a disciple, you have to follow Jesus' teaching."¹⁶⁶

The other participant who requested believer's baptism at Christ Church was told that it was not necessary in the Anglican tradition. This individual later received believer's baptism at a Pentecostal house church in Bangkok while simultaneously attending Christ Church.¹⁶⁷

Another interviewee would like to receive believer's baptism at Christ Church. They were baptized as an infant in the Catholic church in their home country. I explained that in the Anglican tradition, those who received infant baptism generally have their faith confirmed when the bishop visits the church. This person replied, "At some point I will [be baptized or confirmed], but I am not ready for it. If I take baptism and then go back to my old life, this is very bad. It is like a mockery. This is my thinking."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ P6 Interview.

¹⁶⁵ P8 Interview.

¹⁶⁶ P1 Interview.

¹⁶⁷ P7 Interview.

¹⁶⁸ P5 Interview.

This asylee took communion when first attending Christ Church, but they decided not to take communion after that. “I don’t take the communion. We do it each Sunday, right? I just did it once. After that, I felt like I really need to fix my life. First of all, I need to get a lot of wisdom. I need to learn about God more. . . We really need to understand what communion is. If you don’t know, you shouldn’t just come up and take it. We. . . are taught from childhood that if you say a bad word after taking communion, that’s wrong. You have to prepare yourself as a human: control your emotions and whatever you do, especially your mouth. You need to learn first, and then you take communion.”¹⁶⁹ While I admire their desire for purity of intentions, I keep praying that they will learn to accept the grace of God and not be legalistic about receiving communion and walking with Christ.

One participant was baptized in a Presbyterian church at age fifteen. This person chose to be baptized, because it was the age to do so for those who grew up in their family’s village. They were happy to have their two teenagers baptized at Christ Church as well as confirmed by the visiting bishop from Singapore.¹⁷⁰ Another participant grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist family and was baptized when fourteen years old. Before baptism, this individual had to attend lessons to understand the meaning of baptism and the blessings and responsibilities of Christians. They shared that after worshipping at Christ Church, they would prefer to stay in the Anglican tradition and would not return to a Seventh-day Adventist church.¹⁷¹

Although He was sinless, Jesus was baptized. He instructs his disciples to baptize others in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to teach others to obey Him (Matt 28:19-20). Baptism is a Christian ritual. When performed on infants and children, it is often seen as a promise of parents to raise their children with the teachings of the

¹⁶⁹ P3 Interview.

¹⁷⁰ P3 Interview.

¹⁷¹ P4 Interview.

church.¹⁷² Church members also take a vow to help raise the child in the teachings of the church.¹⁷³ For believer's baptism, it is outward demonstration of the person's inner life change in obedience to faith in Christ. All of the interviewees understood the symbolism of baptism, and most of them sincerely tried to live by Christian principles. For those who were baptized as babies and later confirmed in the church, they had to attend lessons before their confirmations as young teenagers. In their classes, they learned various principles and teachings concerning the Christian faith. Those who sought believer's baptism had to interview with the pastor, attend baptism classes or the Alpha Course in order to receive baptism as teens or adults. The practice of meeting with church leaders to discuss baptism or confirmation are indicators of discipleship, increasing in Biblical knowledge and taking the step of obedience in baptism.

5.2 Communion

One asylee is serving Christ Church as a communion assistant to the vicar. They were eager to serve the Lord, and for many years, they have had a goal to preach and teach. They asked Mary Vongsuly, an elder church member, how they could grow up. She recommended that they study *The Anglican Faith: A Layman's Guide*¹⁷⁴ together. Through this book, readers learn about the service of worship and the meanings of each symbol and element, including how to light and extinguish the altar candles and how to prepare the communion elements. There is a reason for this order of worship which they now understand. While the order of worship is not a matter of salvation, they understand it to be giving honor and continuing the Anglican tradition.

When serving the eucharist, this asylee explained that they try to conscientiously focus on Jesus. "This is my routine now, when I stand there, I look at the [stained glass]

¹⁷² "Baptism," *A Service Booklet of the Anglican Church* (Singapore Diocese, 2011), 49.

¹⁷³ "Baptism," *A Service Booklet*, 52.

¹⁷⁴ Dick Begbie, *The Anglican Faith: A Layman's Guide* (Holy Trinity Church, 1985).

picture of Jesus. I tell Jesus, ‘You are the only one who did this for us. Thank you very much for this opportunity to take part in this. The bread represents your body. And this wine that represents your blood.’ I think it is important [to celebrate the eucharist] every week. This is very important to remind you of the persecution that Jesus went through. That’s the main purpose of communion. For me, as long as I take, it reminds me of what he did for us. Take this bread as my body. This is for you. I am thinking of the song. We need to go back to that time to remember what he did for us. Nobody could have done this for us. We need Jesus’ prayers. Alone, we cannot do anything.”¹⁷⁵

As a result of the intentional mentoring, this interviewee has a solid foundation in Anglican worship. The asylee was able to become friends with Mary through the Layman’s Course. They discussed the history and traditions of Anglican practices. Their interactions are an example of discipleship when believers meet to intentionally discuss the Bible or biblical principles (including elements of Anglican worship). This asylee’s interactions fit Martin Manser’s definition of discipleship, in that not only were they learning the teachings of Jesus through independent and group Bible study, they were preparing to serve in the Sunday worship, through an intentional an accountable relationship with a leader in the church community.¹⁷⁶

5.3 Anglican and Other Denominations

One participant who identifies as Catholic understands that Christ Church is Anglican. They describe the worship service as western and not traditional Catholic as in their home country. “I do not think that the details of worship are important, as long as we are worshipping God. We follow the same principles: do not sin, lie or commit adultery. So even if the way of expressing worship and faith is different, it doesn’t matter.

¹⁷⁵ P3 Interview.

¹⁷⁶ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes* (Pennsauken, Manser, 2009), Location 8114.

Catholic mass is the same everywhere, except the language, but I want my kids to grow up worshipping in an English church, so that they understand.”¹⁷⁷

Indeed, this family could worship at an English-speaking Catholic church in Bangkok, but their children are happy and comfortable in the Lighthouse Children’s Program, because they can use English. Because their application for asylum was accepted by the UNHCR, they are in the process of migrating to Canada. Therefore, the parents wish is that their kids become accustomed to worshipping in a western context using English. The parent explained, “It doesn’t matter if our church in Canada is Catholic or Protestant. But I raise them as Christian.”¹⁷⁸

For this refugee, the worship at Christ Church is in English, a language which they understand, but which is not their mother tongue. They are happy to be in church on Sundays, but they are not involved in Bible studies through the church, they choose instead to watch YouTube videos of preachers from the churches in their home country. Christ Church has its limitations in being about to disciple members whose native languages are not English. But the church does not discourage people from participating in various discipling opportunities, notably the Lighthouse Children’s Ministry and Alpha. Some of the Lighthouse volunteers speak other languages and are able to translate and give instructions in those languages when children in their groups need translation.

Alpha also has volunteers who speak a wide variety of languages. Christ Church uses the English-language videos and include the English subtitles in the large group viewing. When a Burmese participant attended Alpha and sat in my small group, I opened up the same video on his mobile phone and cued the subtitles to be in their native dialect rather than in English. While it is enriching to receive Biblical instruction, it is

¹⁷⁷ P6 Interview.

¹⁷⁸ P6 Interview.

essential in discipleship for the participant to discuss the principles and share how the teaching can be applied along with other believers.

One asylee shared that although both of their parents were Catholic, they attended a Protestant Church in their home country, because it was closer to their house. They explained, “We do not side with either Catholic or Protestant. We believe in the Holy Trinity. That’s all. And also we are against worshipping the statues and stuff, so we distance ourselves from that part of Catholics. We know that we are not supposed to worship the statues.”¹⁷⁹

5.4 Unable to Attend Church in Their Home Country

One asylee was able to attend church in their home country only a few times. When the priest understood their family’s Muslim background, the priest requested that they not return to church, because their conversion was against governmental law. When possible, they would drive their car close to the church and pray, asking God for blessings and protection, simply wishing that they could gather with others inside the church to worship and learn more about the faith with others in a Christian community. But because government officials installed cameras at the church to monitor the services and see who attended, the security risk was too great. When they traveled overseas for business, they would research beforehand where they could attend an English-speaking church. They knew of a few different churches in Bangkok from prior business visits. Being able to attend Christ Church weekly as asylum seekers has been an answer to their many years of prayers.¹⁸⁰

Thankfully, this asylee was close to the vicar as well as other leaders of Christ Church. In their informal times of fellowship, they could ask questions to understand the

¹⁷⁹ P5 Interview.

¹⁸⁰ P2 Interview.

different elements of church worship, the liturgy, prayers and creeds. They knew how to find information on the internet, so they could look up translations of the creeds and prayers which were used regularly in Anglican worship. They were eager to learn English, so they learned to memorize and participate in the liturgy in English. With the intentional friendship of church leaders, this asylee was able to grow in their personal devotion, their understanding of the Bible, their participation in the community and eventually their service to the church. Their personal discipleship was vibrant, and they bore fruit for the Kingdom of God. Since they became active in the church, the population of asylees and migrants from their native country has increased in the church. Because of this asylee's spiritual growth and their visible role in the church, they are now encouraging others who speak their native language to get more involved in church. They are sharing the language resources they have used to grow in their understanding. They are meeting with them outside of church for fellowship and to talk about Christ.¹⁸¹

5.5 Home Church

When asked what they liked most about their home church, one asylee explained it was their youth group. The group would often save their money to buy provisions and make packages to give to the elderly and needy in their community. They liked helping others by giving. They remembered some of the youth group members were from poor families who could not help pay for the supplies, but all were welcomed to serve together.¹⁸² Being a refugee in Bangkok, they did not have the opportunity to give or do ministry in the same way. But this refugee shares by helping out with the Lighthouse Children's Ministry and by sometimes sharing food they have cooked with the neighbors in their apartment complex.

¹⁸¹ P2 Interview.

¹⁸² P6 Interview.

5.6 Finding Christ Church in Bangkok

One asylee found Christ Church by doing an internet search. Three units were told about Christ Church by friends. The other participants found Christ Church, because they had family members detained in the Immigration Detention Center which is in the same neighbor as Christ Church, and they passed by the church while taking public transportation. The church building is a cream-colored, gothic structure with a large parking lot and five other buildings. It stands at the corner of busy Sathorn and Convent Roads and looks quite different when compared to the modern embassies, banks and condominiums in the neighborhood. While there are a handful of other English-speaking churches in Bangkok, Christ Church is the oldest, founded in 1864¹⁸³, and is well-known. More than one unit shared that one thing they love is the sacred space. “We like Christ Church. We will stay here. The liturgy and the church feel holy. It feels reverent. I like the sanctuary. It feels like church. My sister visited B Church [another English-speaking church in Bangkok], but we don’t like it. It feels like parliament: a nice building, but modern. It doesn’t feel much like church. We like the old building that looks like a church with the color windows and quiet space for worship.”¹⁸⁴

Another interviewee shared, “I love going into the church. Just walking into the sanctuary, I would sometimes cry, because the Holy Spirit was present there.” This person had a family member detained in the IDC. While visiting, they noted that of those who were detained with her family member, the ones who had connections with Christ Church had more visitors. This made her want to talk more with the other visitors, eventually befriending a Christ Church member and asking how to get to the church.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³

<https://web.archive.org/web/20091004014454/http://www.anglican thai.org/history.htm>. Accessed 7/19/23.

¹⁸⁴ P8 Interview.

¹⁸⁵ P7 Interview.

One unit shared, “We visited another church, but we had a better feeling at Christ Church. We lacked money to go to church far from our place in Silom [the neighborhood]. We visited a small church, but the music was very fast. There was dancing. I need someplace more traditional. I wanted wine and bread to bless my week. I needed a music which was slower.”¹⁸⁶ They wanted a quiet, reflective worship service with repeated liturgy, traditional practices and hymns played softly on the organ or keyboard.

5.7 Feeling Close to God

When I asked further what about Christ Church helped them to feel close to God, the answer was praying at the altar in the front of the church. “When we were new in the church, I would go to the front, and I could not understand very much English. I was crying a lot, and people would hug me. It was a very good feeling. I would count the days until Sunday when I could go back to church and have people pray for me. That time, I could not understand English. I would say to God, ‘God, I don’t know what they are praying for me. You understand their hearts. Please accept their prayer for me. Their prayers survived me.’”¹⁸⁷

I love the description that even though the prayers said for them at the altar which were in a language that they could not understand, they survived, because of these prayers of love. Being English-language learners, they also wanted the call and response in a liturgical worship. They could learn the responses, memorize them and practice using them. It made them feel accomplished when they were able to respond at the right time with the words spoken in unison with other members of the congregation. These refugees felt the love of God through the prayers of His people, even though they could not

¹⁸⁶ P2 Interview.

¹⁸⁷ P2 Interview.

understand the language of the prayers. They felt close to God and an affinity to the body of believers at the altar, giving them hope when they had no other source of hope or encouragement.

The Christ Church building itself is a testimony that encourages refugees and asylees. I am reminded of Gary Thomas's *Sacred Pathways* and the description of sensates: Christians who "want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of God . . . When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring."¹⁸⁸ Refugee and asylee Christians have a variety of spiritual temperaments and relate to God in a variety of ways. Christ Church is a liturgical community of faith. The stained-glass windows depict Biblical characters who encourage those in the church to consider the faith. The altar and communion table are prominently positioned in the front to draw people in to consider Jesus' sacrifice and dedication, as well as their own. The interviewees expressed how they liked the building structure, the steeple and bell which calls them to worship. When they receive and prepare communion, they are encouraged looking up at the stained-glass windows. In reflective, sacred spaces, believers feel that God is near which causes them to behave in a different way than they might in secular spaces.

5.8 Serving God at Christ Church

Another asylee explained that they felt close to God at Christ Church when they served others. "Most of the time that I help the old people, it's very peaceful for me and very happy. I help the children too, because I repaired the playground. For a long time, they could not use it [the playground equipment]. I changed all of them. And I take care

¹⁸⁸ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 15.

of old people, because there is a step, you know. I repaired that too. Helping the children or old people is a miracle of God to me. It's a praise too. Working something like that, I think it's nice."¹⁸⁹

When these refugees first arrived at Christ Church, it took time for them to develop relationships. They learned to receive help from others while they learned to speak English and learned the rhythms of the worship service. They felt that they had little in the way of finances to give, although in their hearts, they really wanted to serve. Through the Alpha Course, the women's fellowship and other meetings, they began to get to know others. Others also got to know them and began to learn about their spiritual gifts and abilities. They began blessing others in the church, giving offerings of ministry and service. Their lives began to have purpose again, which they found by leading the Alpha Course, ushering and repairing structures in the church buildings and playground.

Serving God should always help us to feel close to Him. Christianity is a relationship, and not merely a religion. We should not do rituals just for the sake of practice or tradition. When Christians worship, through ushering, helping the elderly and children, repairing structures, we should be conscientious that we are serving God by helping His people (Col 3:23) and not just performing for others. As believers submit of their actions and thoughts to God, they worship God and become like Christ.

Reverend Norman Jones was the interim vicar when the covid-19 pandemic caused shutdowns and the church began online services. When the church later opened, Norman and his wife Sue hosted a *Christ Church's Got Talent* event, which took place in the vicarage. Church members with different talents could display their talents for others to see and purchase. For example, one church member brought his guitar and sang as friends made requests. One member brought examples of her pencil drawings to display which others could purchase. Others brought food, paintings, arts and crafts and clothes.

¹⁸⁹ P2 Interview.

There were seamstresses who met many new customers who ordered custom-made clothes for years after the talent event. At this event, many asylees participated by sharing their talents. Church members learned of other members' giftings and passions, such as catering, designing, constructing, painting, sewing and playing instruments. This enabled some of the asylees to generate income through informal work, helping to financially sustain their families, since the government does not grant asylum seekers work permits.

Talents may be spiritual gifts, which Christians are given to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12). All Christians have spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7), even the refugees and asylum seekers. When Pastor Norman hosted *Christ Church's Got Talent*, it was an opportunity for all church members to demonstrate their gifts and talents. It was meaningful for asylum seekers to participate, because they could then be called on to work, using their skills and talents which others might not have known they had. Christians are called to help one another: Financial help does not have to be a hand-out which may create dependency. By giving others meaningful labor which they are skilled to accomplish, we honor them. They gain a sense of dignity in their work and remuneration for it.

5.9 Prayer

When asked when they feel close to God, one asylee explained that they feel close to God through prayer. "Many times. . . we face struggles and situations, but through the bad circumstances we become more close to God. Recently my son had an operation, so I was praying, because their wound became infected three times. It was my time to wake up at 4:00 or 4:30 everyday in order to pray. So I would say we need to be close to God all of the time. Our relationship must be very close with him. This is a good thing that we can do. We like to send messages to our friends. God is our friend, and we have an inheritance in His kingdom. We should be sending messages to God by our prayers all

the time. If we know him, he knows us more. We must also listen to Him. If we are close to him, it's good for our spiritual growth. You can grow when there is an answer to prayer. In every situation, we can become closer to God. Or in Lent season too when we try to be closer by fasting or giving something up.”¹⁹⁰ The discipline of personal prayer is a good indicator of this asylee's active discipleship and a desire to grow in their faith.

5.10 Mental Health

The youngest participant explained that going to church keeps them from temptation and turning to the ways of the world. They have not been able to find regular work to help support their family. But feeling stuck at home can too easily lead to depression about the family's undocumented predicament. “Staying at home, all I'm going to do is think about bad things. Think about the pain and trauma, everything that I have. If I go to church, then I have some encouragement that I am not alone. God is with me. So that's why I go to church. I wanted to join the classes.”¹⁹¹

Mental health is a real concern for asylum seekers. When disciples are actively seeking God, they make time for both worship and service. By going to church, with or without other family members, this participant is out of their crowded apartment and focused on worshipping and serving in the church community. After attending an Alpha Course, they started serving the church by assisting the sound technician, both for the English and Thai worship services. They also began helping as security for the Lighthouse Children's Ministry.

During their interviews, two other asylees shared that they were unaware of mental health issues until migrating. One expressed great pain with her vulnerability as a woman, and how incidents while imprisoned for overstaying her visa violated her

¹⁹⁰ P3 Interview.

¹⁹¹ P5 Interview.

personal privacy. “We didn’t know about mental health. Honestly, we didn’t know we needed to seek help for that. I would say that as a woman, I feel a freedom here. The difficulties and circumstances are still not easy. But I have grown as a woman more since I’ve been here. Maybe I understand things better now, because of my age. I have learned through the experiences that I faced, and by people’s guidance. Now I know that mental health is important.”¹⁹²

While her husband Norman served as interim vicar, Sue Jones counseled this asylee and many others. This asylee felt that because they made mistakes, God would not answer their prayers. For some time, they would not pray personal prayers, thinking that they were unworthy of God’s grace or favor. Sue helped them to understand that no one is worthy of God’s grace, but that we should all still pray in faith. “Sue encouraged me to ask God in faith and to stop thinking that I am always guilty or doing something wrong. But she advised me to talk with her, and to find godly friends that we can share with and ask for prayer and help.”¹⁹³

During the covid-19 pandemic when the church was closed for on-site worship, Pastor Norman invited a Christian counselor to talk about mental health and how to manage stress and anxiety during an online worship service. Sue Jones counseled other asylum seekers who were exhibiting post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Before this, a UNHCR doctor gave one asylee medication for fainting spells. But after collapsing at church and recovering with only partial mobility, a church leader took them to a nearby emergency room where the attending physician explained that they were allergic to the medications they had been prescribed. Instead, they had PTSD which did not require medication. Sue listened to them share deeply about their experiences and feelings. Because of Sue’s counseling and friendship, they felt understood and ministered to after

¹⁹² P1 Interview.

¹⁹³ P1 Interview.

experiencing so much rejection and uncertainty in meetings with governmental and NGO officials. These refugees have experienced healing and empowerment and are actively blessing others by participating on the welcome and ushering teams.

Having a licensed counselor on the church leadership is a blessing to church members who seek out mental health counseling. Sue met informally with church members as well as refugees and asylees to befriend and counsel those who needed it. For several years, she worked in Vietnamese refugee camps when her family lived in Hong Kong on a previous ministry assignment. Her experience listening, counseling and seeking out resources were helpful to many at Christ Church. There are other Christian brothers and sisters who are good welcomers and take initiative to meet with others, including refugees and asylum seekers. While not trained in counseling, they have discipling experience with Navigators, YWAM, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Alpha, and their informal friendships with asylees is encouraging and helps them to feel like valued church members.

5.11 The Alpha Course

The Alpha Course is the main Christ Church discipleship curriculum. I had heard about Alpha for years through an InterVarsity friend who was pastoring a multi-ethnic congregation in the USA, but I never had the chance to take the course. In 2017 an expat friend invited me to worship with her at Christ Church. When I heard that they were hosting the Alpha Course, I signed up for the summer course, later choosing to become a member after getting to know new friends through Alpha. One asylee completed the Alpha Course five times and has led small group discussions for several courses over the years. After their first course and getting to know the Alpha leadership, one church leader helped the asylum-seeking family to find affordable housing which enabled them to gain

a sense of security in order to attend church regularly.¹⁹⁴ Another asylee served on the Alpha leadership team in 2022.

Participant 5 started attending Christ Church, because of the Alpha Course. “I have done Alpha before [at another church in Bangkok]. I was younger, so I wasn’t giving 100% attention. I wanted to try it to focus on God again. It helps more than reading the book. We are learning more. That’s why I wanted to join it. Before I felt like I’m lost, and I wanted to know again.”¹⁹⁵

I interviewed this church member while they were taking the Alpha Course. After the course ended, they began serving in the church. Some of their family members continue to attend Christ Church together while other family members attend a house church where their native language is spoken. Like me, this asylee’s parents encouraged them to read the Bible and pray every day. But they felt that they could not understand the Bible by just reading it alone. In order to grow, one must learn the principles of Christ’s teaching. It also helps to discuss these principles with others. Discipleship is choosing to obey Christ’s teaching, which is one of the main principles of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Through the Alpha Course and church worship, this participant was learning to obey Christ and was growing as a disciple.

One asylee attended Alpha at Christ Church twice. During their first course, the asylee was in a small group with a new Christian, who later agreed to be their family’s Life Raft advocate. They are grateful for the friendships built as a result of sharing their common faith and learning together. “You can learn to communicate about your faith, what words you should use to share about your faith. You just learn to understand each other. These are the things that we can learn from Alpha. We grow in our biblical knowledge. Every Sunday, you will get a new question. And at first, sometimes we might

¹⁹⁴ P2 Interview.

¹⁹⁵ P5 Interview.

not know how to answer the questions. So when we discuss the question, we can know more. I love this group. Oh my God. We became very good friends with so many people. We learned from other people who have had different experiences. Even this year, when someone has a question, everyone gives their answer. And it is a nice outcome. Actually, I never would speak or share things, share my thoughts. I feel that Alpha is a place where you can learn many things, new things, confidence. You can speak, you can share ideas. You can be real; you can become friends with others.”¹⁹⁶ This description explains how effective Alpha is in life discipleship!

When I initially met with Reverend Tim Eady, as I was deciding to become a Christ Church member, he explained that he encourages all members to take Alpha, from those seeking baptism to others who will serve in any church team or leadership role, asylum seeker or expat. Not only is Alpha good at introducing basic Christianity, but the small group discussions also encourage participants to share deeply and become friends, building genuine, accountable, Christian community. The structure of Alpha allows for effective leadership training for all church members. If a person wants to serve in Alpha, they can be an assistant to the small group leader, initiating discussion, preparing questions to ask other after the video, sharing personal testimony at appropriate times and following up with small group members during the week. Through active participation and shared responsibility, believers grow into disciples and effective servants in the church and Kingdom of God.

5.12 Bible Study

When I asked one asylee family when they felt close to God, they responded saying that reading their Bible in their native language made them feel close to God. They read the Bible every day and were able to learn and remember its teachings. They

¹⁹⁶ P4 Interview.

also like participating in Bible studies and activities such as Alpha. During the covid-19 shut-down, they attended many of Christ Church's online Bible studies, often being in the vicarage with Norman and Sue. Because of security concerns, they never showed their faces on zoom.¹⁹⁷

Concerning Bible study in their home country, Participant 1 explained that their church leaders taught them to find a quiet place to read the Bible every day:

Start by praying whatever is on your mind. You have to invite the Holy Spirit to guide you and give you wisdom. Whenever you read a Bible, there will be some verses that speak to your heart. We should stop, read the passage again out loud and ask Jesus to teach us what He wants to say to us. Whatever comes to your mind, talk to Jesus about them. I need to focus on these verses or ask if there is something to be thankful for. If there is, then I need to stop and tell the Lord thank you for those things. I pray and talk with Jesus and then end my prayer. When you fix the time, then you can focus, read and pray and spend time with Jesus. They told me never to just read, pray, say amen, close your Bible and go, but to think deeper and spend real time with Jesus.¹⁹⁸

Even though church members in their home church were taught to reflect on Biblical teaching in this way, this asylee mentioned that if they were to return to their birth country, they would bring the concept of small group Bible study to their church. While personal Bible study was encouraged, there was not a forum for church members to discuss Bible readings. Leaders would preach or teach during church worship services, and the churches in the city would host seminars with local and visiting preachers from other countries, but these included preaching and teaching without discussion or sharing from church members.

"I would want for us to learn together and talk about what we think together, not just one preacher teaching," they explained.¹⁹⁹ This asylee experienced a Christ Church small group where the Bible study leader taught about the author who wrote the book and what the circumstances were for God's people when the book was written. The leader explained how the Bible passages could be interpreted and applied for today, sometimes

¹⁹⁷ P2 Interview.

¹⁹⁸ P1 Interview.

¹⁹⁹ P1 Interview.

even explaining words and ideas from the original languages. Those in the Bible study could ask questions, and other participants could share their interpretations and applications. Additionally, when the small group finished studying one book or topic, they would continue with the same format but studying a different book or topic. The asylee explained they do not remember hearing the Bible explained in this way in their home church and would want for Christians in their country to have interactive, small group Bible studies like this, where those studying the Bible could meet year after year to discuss their learning and faith together.

Another asylee shared a story about how he read the Bible on his own for years but did not always understand its teachings. They grew up in the church, but after marriage, they only nominally attended church and enjoyed going out to drink alcohol with friends. This person had a genuine renewal of faith and then became a member of the visitation team at their church, praying and leading Bible studies from house to house for church members or visitors. Even after arriving in Christ Church, they still had questions about Biblical interpretation. They thought it was Biblical to drink alcohol, always pointing to 1 Timothy 5:23. “I tried my best to become a good person. Do you remember when Bishop Henry was here in Christ Church as an Associate Pastor? I went to Bishop Henry and asked him to help me to understand. I showed this verse to him and asked what it means. He said, ‘Sit down here and I will tell you. Timothy had some stomach problems. There is a reason why Paul suggested for Timothy to drink some wine, but the wine is not for you. Okay?’ ”²⁰⁰

This interviewee is now studying the Bible from an online seminary, so that they can know and teach the Bible accurately. “We need to read the Bible every day. It’s actually food. It’s not just reading a book. It’s food for my soul, for my spirit.”²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ P3 Interview.

²⁰¹ P3 Interview.

Another asylee explained how their parents encouraged personal Bible study and prayer. “My parents used to regularly study the Bible in the morning for personal devotions. My father and mother separately would read their Bibles. This is what we do regularly in the home. Either in the morning or at night before sleeping, we read the Bible. My option, what I used to do, I am regularly reading the Bible, otherwise, I am praying, every day. This is my routine. It has become my habit now. So in the morning when I wake up, even if it’s dark, even during the night if I wake up, I start practicing my habit now. And my [spouse] spends a whole hour. I pray only 15 minutes! God still answers me. But they always force me to read the Bible as well. Nowadays with nothing to do and nowhere to go, I wake up and read the Bible and then I pray. I give thanks to the Lord. It takes 10 minutes or 20 minutes for me. But [they] take hours. Even our children, especially. . .the second one, their habit is now to wake up, take a bath and before breakfast, they will read the Bible and pray. They are regular. For the younger ones, [my spouse] makes them sit next to them. I don’t ask them to sit with me. In my routine, I pray for myself, and I pray for them. When I am supposed to go somewhere, if I don’t have time, or if I forgot, I start praying on the motorbike. ‘Take me safe. Bring me back safe.’ That’s it. This is the routine.”²⁰² The routines of prayer and Bible study demonstrate growth in understanding and practice for many of the asylees that I interviewed. It was especially heartening to learn that families worshipped in their homes as individuals and as a family unit.

Throughout their childhood, one asylee had the family tradition of attending church every week. From primary school through secondary school, this person boarded in the church’s hostel where they had worship meetings every morning and evening. On Wednesdays, they would also go to a church service. They would attend church on Fridays and for the weekend worship. They were taught to keep the Sabbath holy, from

²⁰² P4 Interview.

the night before for twenty-four hours. They would go out with one of the pastors or leaders to visit families in the rural areas and villages, close to the hostel. They taught about the Bible, prayer and served their community.²⁰³

About personal Bible study, the asylee explained, “To read it on your own, then listen to the explanation is a very good way to finish the Bible. These things all depend on your interest. If you are interested to know about Christ or want to know what is written inside the Bible, how you want to live your life, then you can go through these things. If you are not interested, you are busy with your own thoughts, people never pay any attention. If I want to learn, then I will go to church. A certain time comes when you will ask questions. If I just keep quiet, then maybe I am not reading my Bible. You have to be prepared. So you should read your Bible, then you will be able to answer and be able to take part in a discussion.” This is one of the participants who became active in the church by joining the choir and participating in Alpha small group discussions.

Another asylee described various Bible study options at Christ Church. The church bulletin lists regular Bible studies at church and online, revival prayer meetings. These meetings are helpful when “I am weak in a spiritual way or I want to learn more. [They tell us] which book are you going to [study together] . . . I want to learn. So the Bible study group team, they will help participants to grow in faith. I believe that’s great.”²⁰⁴ We can see that while some refugees learned effective Bible study methods in their home churches, their understanding has grown since being engaged in worship and ministry at Christ Church. As they learn the Bible’s teachings and practice living its principles, their faith is strengthened and serve others as well as be served.

²⁰³ P4 Interview.

²⁰⁴ P3 Interview.

5.13 Liturgy and Worship

Concerning the Anglican liturgy, one asylee who identifies as Catholic shared their opinion, “Liturgy does help me to feel closer to God. I feel connected to God during the mass. Also, no matter what part of the world you’re at if you attend mass of Catholics, Anglicans or Methodists you can participate in the mass, even if the language is different. No offense to the people who do not follow or like going according to liturgy, you can go into someone’s zone and disturb their comfort. It’s all about one’s faith and comfort.”²⁰⁵ They do not feel like they are missing elements from the worship by attending Christ Church. When their family was released from the Immigration Detention Center after three years of detention, one of their first worship services was the Christmas Eve service. They were overjoyed to celebrate the eucharist together, sing the Christmas hymns and enjoy the Christingle tradition.

When asked what they like most about Christ Church worship, another asylee explained, “The best thing is the discipline, like in order of the service like worship, message, prayer healing, prayer meetings. You can enjoy the whole service. But I love the way the Christ Church nowadays sings three praise songs. I love that. Actually, this is the how we worship in [my home country]. It is more informal, more Spirit-led as opposed to the liturgy.”²⁰⁶

Another asylee shared similar feelings about contemporary worship. “For me, I enjoy free worship. I like that the pastor is introducing more instruments. In the past it was just the keyboard and the organ. Now there are more instruments. I like the worship more now. What I really like is the time to say hello during service. In the past, we would walk around and shake hands, and you can greet your old friends in the middle of service. Then after covid, we did the Thai *wai*, (greeting from a distance without touching). Either way, whether it is walking up to everyone and giving them a hug or a handshake, or the

²⁰⁵ P8 Interview.

²⁰⁶ P3 Interview.

wai, I like saying hello to everyone during the service.”²⁰⁷ Coming from a Pentecostal background, they preferred praise songs to hymns. They like passing the peace during the service, because of the opportunity to greet others.

When asked what they liked most about Christ Church, one asylee explained that they liked the people. “The people there are nice and humble. The people follow God’s moral principles to help one another at the church and the community outside of the church. I have good relationships with others.”²⁰⁸

5.14 Discipleship at Christ Church

When I asked if Christ Church leaders could do more to help members grow in their discipleship, one asylum seekers shared that the church does not really have to do more, but it is up to the members to be motivated to attend worship and church activities. “It’s your responsibility. It ends up if you are hungry for the knowledge or not. Do you want this knowledge or not? Do you want to be a part of this or not? It’s not like the pastor is saying we have a very good party, you should come. It’s not like that. Since it’s there, you should go.”²⁰⁹

I found this opinion to be interesting, because as a leader, I always wonder if we should be doing more to get people to come into the church. I also wonder how we can help those who come to become more active. This asylee believes that the responsibility is up to each Christian to find their church and then decide to become active members.

When I asked what it means to be a disciple of Christ, one shared that it means to become a follower of someone who can give you guidance. “Disciples want footsteps to walk in.”²¹⁰ To be a good disciple of Jesus, “Your heart should be clean. You should be a

²⁰⁷ P1 Interview.

²⁰⁸ P6 Interview.

²⁰⁹ P5 Interview.

²¹⁰ P3 Interview.

positive person. You should always think good things which will help others. If your heart is not clean, how can you be a good disciple or follower of Jesus? You should acknowledge Him in every area of your life. And that comes only when you read your Bible regularly. We got our sin nature from Adam and Eve. When we do wrong things, we are still in cycle of death. But being a Christian, we must always ask God for forgiveness, if I did it knowingly or not. Don't sin purposely, intentionally, that's when it becomes sin. If you commit sin unknowingly, when you know it's wrong, you can ask for forgiveness. We sin every day. We should go to him. He has already taken our sins. He gave his life. But being human, we cannot be pure.”²¹¹

This church members went on to explain the importance of being active as a family in the church. “You and all your household should pray and worship God and serve as an asylum seeker. I might not serve a way by giving financially. But I would love to serve by giving my whole person to the church. Be involved in every part of the church. One thing I always remember about Pastor Norman just before he left Christ Church. One thing he said that was wonderful is that the book of Acts is not finished. It is in a continuous tense. That means we are part of the book of Acts when we are workers in his kingdom. We must do something for God in the church or outside of the church. The church is a wonderful place to grow in a faith worship, listening to songs and to do Bible study regularly. Then you know what to do.”²¹²

This participant has a clear conviction of Christian discipleship. It is a personal faith that involves acknowledging Christ to cleanse from our human sin stains and wrongdoing, but faith should want us to be involved in a community faith where one's family worships and serves in the body of Christ together, continuing the work that Jesus started.

²¹¹ P3 Interview.

²¹² P3 Interview

When I asked what more Christ Church leaders could do to help asylees to grow more in their faith, one interview responded, “God only helps those who help themselves. So that is why I still do not call myself a Christian. That’s why I go to church, to become a Christian. It’s not just a religion. It’s a connection. Christianity is a relationship and not just a religion. I want my relationship to get stronger, and then I’ll call myself a Christian.”²¹³ They have faith, but they want that faith to grow more. They are self-critical, feeling that their faith is not what it should be. But they are on the right track by now regularly attending church, connecting with other church members and serving in different ministries.

It was encouraging for me to meet with and interview the different asylum seekers at Christ Church, learning of their faith experiences and how they continue to grow at Christ Church. I learned how valuable it is for each person to feel welcomed as a family member in the church, not merely associating with those from their country of birth, but also getting to know others in our multi-ethnic congregation. Many are from cultures where hospitality is important, and people are more communal than individualistic. Even though they live in humble circumstances, they enjoy welcoming me into their homes, serving tea and food and simply sharing life together.

For many of those I interviewed, what makes asylum seekers feel like real members of the church family is having ministry roles, whether helping in the Children’s Lighthouse Ministry, being on the welcome team, serving food during lunch or ushering. These roles allow them to contribute to the worship, rather than being passive church attendees. It also enables them to build relationships with other church members, bringing mutual edification and building up the body of Christ.

In my own personal discipleship experience as a college student, I had mentors who were trained as leaders with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. They took an interest

²¹³ P5 Interview.

in my growth, meeting with me individually to share, pray and hold me accountable to personal goals (academic, spiritual growth). They gave me personal feedback on my role as a leader in the Christian fellowship which helped me to develop my skills and sensitivity to the Spirit and others. They challenged me to take on leadership roles for which I did not think I was ready, like worship leading or teaching the Bible. But they always offered support and encouragement, which made me feel safe enough to step out in faith. I acknowledge that most Christians will not have mentors who will do the same for them. As *The Compass* describes, I was F.A.T: faithful, available and teachable,²¹⁴ so it was easy to be singled out for mentorship. However, I found out quickly that what worked to help me grow as a disciple would not necessarily work for others. And when I began mentoring other Christians, I had to find meaningful ways to challenge and encourage each person individually, and not necessarily mimic my mentor's leadership. How much more do I have to be open-minded, creative and thoughtful in discipling Christians from other cultures and other faiths.

I have been involved with the ministry at Christ Church Bangkok since the summer of 2017 when the church hosted the Alpha Course. Since then, I have met in peer discipleship groups and small groups with others who have had similar discipleship experiences and expectations that I had during my college years with IVCF. Each person in my current peer discipleship group was looking for mutual accountability, support and friendship. We all know or meet with others regularly, through Alpha, choir or regularly attending Sunday worship. Our Anglican Church has a high turnover rate, among both expats and refugees. Regardless of experiences in fellowship and mentoring, all discipling relationships should be considered as gifts from God to mold us all into greater Christlikeness.

²¹⁴ "Always Keep the End in Mind – Transferring Your Leadership," *The Compass*. Cru, 2007.

Discipleship with refugees requires commitment and a willingness to have your heart broken, in the event that asylees are sent back to their home countries when their applications are denied or in the event that they move on to a third country. In all stages of evangelism, discipleship and church planting, it is important to remember the early gathering of disciples after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They studied the Bible and learned to apply the scriptures in every circumstance. They gathered with other Christians in corporate worship and other fellowship activities. They celebrated communion together in their fellowships, remembering Christ's sacrifice. They prayed continually. These are activities in which all disciples should engage. As for refugees and asylum seekers, they should also be encouraged to engage in these Christian activities in order to grow in maturity. The Christ Church Bangkok leadership has chosen to engage with refugees and asylum seekers as they would engage all people, regardless of their migration or legal status. There are very few activities only for refugees or asylum seekers, in the same way that there are no specific activities planned just for expats from the UK in our Anglican Church. Nearly all church activities are open for all to attend freely. One exception is the monthly Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting, which is not a public meeting. Whether it is the Alpha Course (evangelism/discipleship curriculum), the Children's Lighthouse Sunday School Ministry, the Women's Monthly Fellowship, on-line or on-site Bible studies or small groups, all people are welcome.

There are a limited number of activities only open to refugees and asylum seekers. When requested, Life Raft may host a meeting after a Sunday service to introduce new asylum seekers to their ministry. Christ Church supports the work of Life Raft and is its biggest supporter in Thailand. There are many Life Raft advocates from the Christ Church, who serve as liaisons for the asylum seekers. Life Raft trains advocates and manages funds from sponsors to provide limited financial support for asylum seekers. The advocates hold the asylum seekers accountable to their personal goals and for the

financial support they receive. Advocates generally become friends and prayer partners for the asylum seekers. They are often there when the asylum seekers celebrate birthdays or have other needs. Life Raft advocates can be from other faiths, and do not always attend Christ Church. Not every refugee or asylum seeker at Christ Church has a Life Raft advocate, since financial and human resources are limited.

Every quarter, when funds are available, Christ Church has a food pantry for refugees and asylum seekers who regularly attend Christ Church. Families can come to church to pick up groceries and other goods to supplement their family's needs. During Christmas 2022, there was a Christmas party held specifically for refugees and asylum seekers who regularly attend Christ Church. Invitations were given by word of mouth or via telephone call. The party was not advertised in the church bulletin or website, so as not to attract non-members. Church workers served a meal, led games and distributed Christmas gifts to all who attended.

Refugees and asylum seekers are involved in most ministries of the church. The Alpha leadership team receives training in evangelism and leading small groups. Similarly, Lighthouse Sunday school teachers receive training to equip them to work with children. In one case, an asylum seeker requested one-on-one discipleship in order to become a eucharist minister. He regularly assists the vicar in preparing communion elements before and during our Sunday worship services. There are refugees and asylum seekers who serve at the welcome table, as ushers, choir members and scripture readers. Refugees and asylum seekers cannot legally work at the church, because they cannot get work permits to be financially compensated. We have not yet had a vicar who is an asylum seeker, nor have there been members of the parochial church council (PCC) who are asylum seekers. These are some examples of how refugee and asylum seekers engage in meaningful discipleship activities by serving regularly in the church.

4.13 Suggestions for Other Discipleship Opportunities

After my research analysis, I make the following suggestions to the Christ Church leadership regarding discipleship for all church members, including refugees and asylum seekers.

1. Host Sunday school classes/workshops before the Annual Meeting, emphasizing membership to all and encouraging communication, participation and leadership in Christ Church ministries. Create a unique Christ Church ritual for all members to participate in together every year before the Annual Meeting.
2. Create an annual celebration for Christ Church's Anniversary (April 30, 1904) where a short history is shared of the church (including elementary teachings about Anglicanism) and of church members. Include new rituals such as sharing phrases or songs of praise during Sunday worship where people hear the languages represented by the church. Encourage members to wear national costumes from their home countries and to bring potluck dishes for lunch to celebrate the church family's rich diversity.
3. Highlight every church ministry during the church year – including participation and testimonies from diverse participants and leaders from each ministry. Encourage regular training within each ministry, so that church members feel supported to become leaders.
4. Welcome outside ministries which Christ Church supports to participate in worship services, giving testimonies about their organizations. This is important for Life Raft to share what they do, recruit new advocates and celebrate the families and who are active participants.
5. Regularly host a variety of adult Sunday School classes and workshops on Sundays, such as the Alpha Course, An Introduction to Anglicanism/the Protestant faith, Christian Parenting, Mental Health Awareness, Cross-cultural Transitions, Spiritual Gifts, Family Devotions, Evangelism Training, the Lausanne Covenant, Reading Fables and Traditional Stories Along with Scripture.
6. The vicar and church leaders can preach and teach diaspora theology, missiology and Sabbath observance.
7. Celebrate the women's fellowship group. Add a men's fellowship group. Encourage members to share songs of faith in languages other than English during these fellowship meetings.
8. Encourage personal initiative and creativity for families to be self-supporting, including events like Christ Church's Got Talent.

9. In the Lighthouse Sunday School, go beyond teaching scripture memory of isolated verses by encouraging dramatic readings and reciting psalms.
10. Host day-long retreats at the church for people to have sacred space and time to reflect personally and corporately.

In my final chapter, I write my conclusions about how the refugees and asylum seekers at Christ Church Bangkok find meaning in their past and present church activities and how they continue to grow in their discipleship.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Those in Bangkok

After interviewing the eight refugee/asylum seeker units at Christ Church, I was encouraged to learn about how these brothers and sisters exercised their faith in their home countries, how they exercise their faith in Bangkok and in their current countries and how they perceive and evaluate their spiritual growth as followers of Christ.

The youngest person that I interviewed had been in Bangkok for ten years. Their family faithfully attended church together in their home country, but this individual has matured in their faith, especially in the past two years. Their family is unable to worship together in the same fellowship, because their mother prefers to attend a church where her native language is spoken, while her children prefer to worship in English. Their mother is the diligent prayer warrior for the family and constantly encourages her children to honor Christ, go to church and read their Bibles. Still, because of their status as undocumented and their inability to get a work permit or visa, this interviewee expressed anger and resentment towards God for allowing their family to be in their current circumstances. While they believe that God is with them, and that His promises are coming true, they struggle to accept the grace of God. I could hear in their voice a sense that they had to work for their salvation, and that nothing in life is free, because nothing has been free in their circumstances. They feel that they are working harder than they should have to work just to have their daily needs met. It is heartbreaking, and it is

their reality. But because they are finding hope to Jesus through Christ Church, especially through his participation in Alpha, making relationships and joining the Lighthouse Ministry and helping with the tech/AV committee during Sunday worship. These activities give them a place to share their joys and griefs, be encouraged and serve others. Because church gives them purpose, their faith is growing.

The two Catholic units that I interviewed loved their church families in their home countries. They were active in youth ministries. One enjoyed serving as a junior counselor for summer camps, and the other doing outreach ministry to sick and elderly church members. Their home churches observed sacred seasons and festivals which had their own rituals and activities. At Christ Church, one of the interviewees has recently become active in the Lighthouse Children's Ministry and really enjoys teaching kids about the faith. Their family worships at Christ Church together and have times of fellowship and prayer at home together. Another has become involved in their children's Lighthouse classes as a teaching assistant and helper. They are not as secure using English as their children are. They continue to read their Bible regularly in their native language and regularly listen to sermons on YouTube, preached by ministers in her home country. Both of these interviewees would identify as Catholic rather than Christian and feel like they are growing in their faith personally through Bible study and prayer, but also through fellowship and ministry at Christ Church.

The challenge for one of the Catholic interviewees is that there are not currently other people at Christ Church who speak their language. While YouTube sermons are valuable for their instruction, they are not able to interact deeply with others in their own language to talk about faith, discuss Biblical application or answer questions regarding personal holiness and accountability. However, they did not complain that anything was missing in their faith walk. I may think that they would thrive if they had other families to interact with and discuss faith more in-depth using their mother tongue. But maybe it is

my Western, evangelical mindset which thinks that they need something that I had in my personal discipleship when they feel content and encouraged as they serve in the church.

The interviewees who are new to the Christian faith were unable to attend church in their home country, for fear of persecution from family members who were strict adherents to a local religion. They are grateful to be at Christ Church where they have grown a lot in their understanding of the Bible and Christianity. They are Alpha leaders and active in the church through ushering, maintaining the property and creating works of art. They are close to two missionary couples who meet with them regularly for fellowship and care. These refugees can testify of God's miracles for their provision and protection. It is a blessing to know them and see them thriving at Christ Church.

Two of the asylees I interviewed are the most active in Christ Church ministries of all of the interviewees. Their applications to the UNHCR were rejected, and yet they serve God joyfully. They are scripture readers, communion assistants, ushers, Lighthouse teachers and assistants and Alpha small group leaders. They attend church for Bible study, prayer meetings, Sunday worship and other times of fellowship. They both speak of Christ and testify to miracles He has done in their lives, attesting to their personal relationships with Him. They genuinely wish to please God and follow His teachings. Both would say that they had good churches in their home countries, but that they are experiencing deeper fellowship with God in Bangkok, because of their circumstances, and because they have found authentic fellowship and meaningful roles in the church. While they are uncertain about their futures in Thailand or elsewhere, they believe in God's direction every day, and put their trust in His sovereignty over their lives.

6.2 Those Resettled

Two of the interviewees are now resettled in third countries where they continue to attend churches regularly. They both look back at their times in Bangkok fondly. Even

though they uncertain about daily provisions, they were dependent on God and enjoyed His grace there. They are still adapting to their new cultures. One was resettled three years ago, and the other one year ago. Their faith is meaningful, and they can critically assess their personal discipleship. One was frustrated that they did not have as much time to study the Bible and participate in church activities as they had when they were in Bangkok. They were grateful to be in a new country, but they felt the challenge of balancing work, family and church responsibilities. The other was feeling stifled, because they were attending a Mennonite Church where they were not yet allowed to serve. The Mennonite Church sponsored their resettlement, so they feel obligated to worship there. It will take time for them to become full church members before they are allowed to serve in similar roles to those they had at Christ Church (teaching in the Lighthouse Children's Ministry and singing in the choir).

6.3 Discipling the Whole Church

It was a privilege for me to interview the refugees and asylees at Christ Church Bangkok. It was important for me to learn of their lives of faith before they moved to Bangkok, hearing about their worship experiences, memorable youth group activities, power encounters, evangelistic meetings and seminars which formed their faith, so that I can be a more effective discipler and a better friend. It was encouraging to learn how different church leaders and members welcomed each unit into the church family and encouraged them to get involved. The challenge is for the whole church is to continue to integrate asylees, refugees, expatriates and Thai Christians into one body under Christ. The church leaders must continue to compassionately encourage new members, as well as empower everyone to discover and use their spiritual gifts to serve one another. Those who preach and teach have the opportunity to explain the theology of migration, the priesthood of all believers and theories of transition, not only for the benefit of asylees

and refugees, but also for expats and Thai nationals who have studied or worked abroad. The church leaders can create new customs and rituals in the church calendar: leading workshops and classes to teach newer members learn about Protestantism, Anglicanism and to make new memories at Christ Church.

6.4 For Further Study

An aspect of faith which I recommend to be researched further is how Christian refugees and asylees view the concept of salvation by grace, not as the result of human effort. Some interviewees spoke strictly about sin to the extent that they did not feel like they were completely forgiven. One refugee said that they thought God was angry with them, which is why their paperwork in the resettlement process was delayed.²¹⁵ One mentioned that they wanted believer's baptism, but they felt that they were not ready, because they needed to work some things out with God about their sins.²¹⁶ Another said that they were afraid to pray, because God had not answered their prayers since they left their home country. They would ask for intercession from church leaders, but they felt they were not holy enough for God to hear their own prayers.²¹⁷ Some of these ideas are simple misunderstandings about the Christian faith. The interviewees who converted from another religion where just never taught about grace correctly. Grace is a concept that all Christians need to understand and accept, without abusing. It may have to do with honor and shame in the Asian context, without completely understanding the culturally western concepts of sin and grace.

It would be interesting to explore the dynamics of honor and shame with refugees and asylees at Christ Church. The biblical truths that Jesus takes our shame and gives humans honor and dignity are life-giving for all, but especially for refugees who are

²¹⁵ P1 Interview.

²¹⁶ P5 Interview.

²¹⁷ P2 Interview.

Asian where shame is a major cultural deterrent for individual decisions. It would be instructive for refugees and asylees to learn about the honor that Jesus bestows, in spite of cultural shame one may experience as a result of conversion or migration.

It would also be helpful for a researcher interview refugees and asylees to understand their concept of *shalom*. According to Zahniser, “Every issue facing communities must be understood in the light of God’s redeeming love. God is committed to touch every area of life with the good of the people in mind. Making these connections – interpreting God’s redeeming plans for all of life and enabling disciples to bring *shalom* to others – is what discipling is all about.”²¹⁸ For me to truly understand the refugees at Christ Church, I should have asked them how they have experienced *shalom* in the past, how they seek *shalom* in their lives, families and the church and how they pass on *shalom* to others.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

There are an increasing number of books and studies related to migration and ministry to refugees and asylum seekers. Discipleship may be a niche category of these books, but every people group and each church has its specific challenges and opportunities. Ultimately for me, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship discipleship model is the most effective way to make disciples. The biblical reading/teaching, active response, and debrief can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals and groups. Growth happens, because of intentional, personal relationships, such as the relationship that developed when one interviewee read *The Anglican Faith: A Layman’s Guide* with another church member. As disciplers and disciples grow together, they apply biblical principles and share their experiences in order to keep learning from one another. When disciplers become aware of resources meant for refugees and migrants, both spiritual and

²¹⁸ Zahniser, *Symbol*, 20.

material, they can grow in compassion, flexibility and effectiveness. Vicar Norman was an interim pastor for less than two years. Yet, in that time, he increasingly engaged asylees and refugees into the life and ministries of the church. It is helpful that his wife Sue had experience working in Vietnamese refugee camps on a previous assignment. Capitalizing on urban refugees' freedom outside of refugee camps, Norman and Sue looked for ways to empower and release asylum seekers into Christ Church ministries. It is now the calling for all church members to welcome and equip others to serve Christ and the church (Eph 4:11-13).

When church members get to know just one asylum seeker, the relationship opens up their understanding of families and communities who are in transition and enables Christians to advocate for and be a blessing to them. Interviewing the individuals and families for this study helped me understand better how to be disciple one asylee with whom I continue to meet. Knowing her better helps me to understand the challenges of other asylees: I pray with better understanding of her needs and circumstances, and I act with greater compassion. Having invested in the relationships at Christ Church, I also share these friendships with women in my small group, people in the choir, fellow teachers in the Lighthouse Children's Ministry. The relationships affect how I pray for individuals at Christ Church, both personally and corporately in Sunday worship, or in my small group, so that others also learn about my asylee friends.

A friend of mine had three asylee teenagers in her Alpha small group. She invited these teens on a daytrip where they went snorkeling in a neighboring province. Although the teens have lived in Bangkok for eight years, they had only been to the beach once before in Thailand. Their experience snorkeling with their Alpha small group leader is an experience they will never forget!

Christ Church is strategically positioned in a Bangkok with unique opportunities to disciple asylum seekers into disciples-makers of the nations - back in their home

counties, in Thailand and to the ends of the earth! The vicars and church leaders are dedicated to seeing that all members know Christ, and so I look forward to seeing how the church will grow in discipleship, fulfilling its mission and purpose. The church constitution states, “Christ Church welcomes all worshippers and seekers of the knowledge of the Christian faith and affirm its role and place as a home for all Protestant believers.”²¹⁹ May our church family indeed be a growing family of the faithful who creatively and freely worship the living God. “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen.”²²⁰

²¹⁹ The Constitution of Christ Church Bangkok, Amended 3/13/2011. Accessed 9/4/2023.

²²⁰ Revelation 1:5-6.

APPENDIX

My central research question is how do asylum seekers at Christ Church Bangkok grow in discipleship?

The key research questions for this qualitative study are:

1. How did refugees and asylum seekers exercise faith in their home countries?
2. How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise their faith in Bangkok and in their current countries (if they have been resettled to a third country or returned to their home country)?
3. How do refugees and asylum seekers perceive and evaluate their growth as followers of Christ?

The interviews may include the following additional questions:

4. How long have you been attending Christ Church Bangkok?
5. Who (if anyone) goes to church with you? How are they related to you?
6. How did you hear about this church? Did you also visit other churches in Bangkok?
7. Why did you choose to be a member of Christ Church?
8. What are some of the activities that you are involved with here?
9. What are some things that we do at Christ Church that help you to feel close to God?
10. Tell me how about when you became a Christian (or when you realized that your family was Christian)?
11. Do you remember the first time you ever prayed and had personal understanding that you were talking with God?
12. Was there a time that you made an individual decision to believe/follow Jesus along with your family?
13. Did anyone ever ask you pray a prayer to become a Christian for the first time or did you always believe? Who was that person and what were the circumstances?
14. Have you been baptized and can you tell me why you wanted to be baptized?
15. Please tell me about a time that you really felt close to God.
16. Have you ever experienced a time or season that you felt far from God? Was God far from you or were you far from God?
17. Did you go to church in your home country? What were some church activities that you did there?
18. What activities did you do in your home church that helped you to feel close to God and know about Him more?
19. What do you miss about the worship at your home church?
20. What activities helped you to grow in your faith and understanding of God?
21. What does it mean to you to be a follower of Christ?
22. What can help you to grow more to be like Jesus?

23. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you didn't call yourself a Christian?
24. How long have you been resettled in your current country?
25. Are you a member of a church? Tell me about the church activities that you attend.
26. What are some things that you do to become more like Jesus?
27. When someone says that they are a Christian what do you think that means?
28. Why is it important for you to call yourself a Christian?

Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your faith or discipleship?

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